Quarterly Series

TWENTY-THIRD VOLUME

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED

HAVERSTOCK HILL NW

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THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED

IN MIND AND MANNERS

BY

BENEDICT ROGACCI

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

THE TRANSLATION EDITED BY

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE

Of the same Society

NEW EDITION

LONDON

BURNS AND OATES

GRANVILLE MANSIONS W

1884

Rev. J. F. Ballagan, Q. C.

PREFACE.

[BY THE EDITOR.]

BENEDETTO ROGACCI, the author of the volume now presented to the reader, was a native of Ragusa, born in 1646, and admitted to the Society of Jesus at Rome in his fifteenth year. His life seems to have had but few vicissitudes or marked events, for after teaching "rhetoric" for a short time, he was sent to the noviceship as assistant to the Master of Novices, and was employed during the remainder of his life, which lasted into his seventy-third year, in giving retreats in the religious houses of the Society. His most famous work is the long treatise, in three parts, with an Introduction and Appendix, making up five volumes, called *L'Uno Necessario*. It is one of the very finest ascetical works which the Society of Jesus has produced, treating first of the knowledge of God, and then of the fruits of this knowledge in the soul, that is, of affective and effective love. Father Rogacci was a perfect theologian as well as a fervent ascetic, and it is this which gives to his works their singular excellence, solidity, and clearness. An extract from this great work, containing a number of chapters on confidence in God and on the manner of conversing with

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Him familiarly, has been published more than once in France, and is to be found at the end of Father Dufrène's *Decem Triduana*. This extract has also been published in England. But the great work itself still remains untranslated in our language, though it exists in a Latin version as well as in the Italian original.

The present work may be considered as the fruit of the great experience of Father Rogacci in giving retreats. It was written almost at the end of his long life. He tells us, in the few words which he has prefixed to it by way of advertisement, that he was induced to publish it chiefly by the pressure put upon him by a religious friend, and by the hope of being of use to some good soul, against his own judgment. We cannot know whether his judgment was against the publication of such volumes in general, or simply founded on his low estimate of his own powers. As to the last point, if that were the cause of his dislike to the publication, there will be few among his readers who are not grateful to the friend who forced him to overcome his hesitation. The volume is one of those series of meditations in which the whole substance and system of the Exercises of St. Ignatius are worked up, although not precisely in the form in which they lie in the Exercises themselves. The meditations are meant for persons of all classes, not only for religious persons, and those who are familiar from practice with the text of the book itself of St. Ignatius, will not fail to see how perfect an acquaintance with and mastery of it must have been possessed by Father Rogacci. He supposes the exercitant to be able to give not more

than eight days to the retreat, and has arranged the matter accordingly. He gives, indeed, four meditations for each day, as well as an introductory meditation, and another at the end on the selection of a state of life for those whose state is not yet fixed. But he tells us, in the short notice to which reference has already been made, that it was his own practice not to give his exercitants more than three meditations a day, with a repetition, or some practical considerations helping to the reformation of life, in the afternoon. The place of these considerations is supplied in the present work by a number of practical reflections which he calls *riforme*, one of which he would have the exercitant read each day at the time of the consideration. There are sixteen of these considerations, in order that the exercitant may choose for himself, or as directed by his spiritual guide, whose assistance is supposed in works like this, according to his special needs. Father Rogacci adds that he advises those who would follow his method to choose three meditations for each day, as they think best, but he has given at the end of the volume,[1] a list of those which he was in the habit of selecting when he gave the Exercises himself. He recommends the same method with the considerations, in case the eight first are not found in all cases to suit the particular condition and wants of the exercitant.

H. J. C.

London, Feast of the Dedication of St. Michael the Archangel, 1877.

[1] The list is printed below, p. xii.

Rev. J. F. Bourgeat, O. S.

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Rev. J. F. Bamyan, O. S.

PREPARATORY MEDITATION.

To be made the evening before commencing the Exercises, in order to enter upon them in better dispositions.

SUMMARY.

I. We ought, by all right reason, to have served God from the beginning of our lives to the present time with the same perfection and justice with which He has been served by the greatest saints of the Church.

II. We have done the very opposite of this.

III. We ought once for all to determine to correct this disorder, and to perform the duties we have hitherto neglected; and this we should do at once, seeing that we are uncertain how much longer we have to live.

IV. The most fitting time for entering on this new manner of life is that of the Spiritual Exercises: we ought, therefore, to make them with the greatest care, as if we knew that we should very shortly die, and as a preparation for death.

V. What those things are which will most help us to derive this fruit from the Exercises.

I. Consider the manner of life which you have been bound to lead all the time that you have been in the world, being, as you are, by nature subject to God, endowed by Him with reason, and created for heaven. First, as the creature of God, and therefore subject to Him with a closer and more complete subjection than that of any slave to his master, justice requires that you should serve Him faithfully, by doing whatever He has commanded and by avoiding whatever could offend Him. You cannot possibly deny that every servant and

vassal is bound to behave in this way even to his earthly master, in order to fulfil his obligations, and it is what you claim from every servant of your own as a clear matter of duty. Secondly, as you are endowed with reason, you ought to be guided by it in all your life as by what is man's distinctive quality, and not, on the contrary, to suffer yourself to be carried away by the appetites of your inferior part, like the brutes: "Thy lust shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it."[1]

Thirdly, being created for heaven, all your thoughts and affections ought to be directed thither, and you should live on the earth as one who is merely passing through it, "as a stranger and a foreigner," despising earthly things, and valuing heavenly ones only. Fourthly, since heaven is only to be won by the merit gained by good works done on earth, your whole study ought to be to perform as many virtuous actions as possible in the day, letting slip no opportunities of doing one, but on the contrary, always watching for them with the eagerness of a careful merchant. To sum all up shortly, your whole life ought to be like the lives of St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis Borgia, St. Louis of France and the rest of the saints whom we now venerate on our altars. Yes—be assured with all possible certainty, that your virtue, holiness, and perfection ought in no degree to fall short of theirs, for they did no good thing which they were not bound in all justice to do, and to be a saint simply means to perform every duty perfectly, and to act in all things according to the requirements of perfect reason. And this truth is well expressed in many passages of the Sacred Scriptures, where holiness is called justice, that is, the discharge of our duties, and especially in that great admonition which our Lord gives us by the pen of St. Luke: "When you shall have done

[1] Genesis iv. 7.

all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which we ought to do."[2]

II. Consider whether you have hitherto led such a life as this; going mentally through all the past, or at least so much of it as has elapsed since your last Exercises. Oh, what a difference you will find in every particular! How little reverence, fidelity, and obedience to God! How often have you offended Him, either grievously or more lightly, every day! What a life, more like that of an animal which follows the impulse of the sensitive appetite, than of a man guided by the dictates of right reason! How have you forgotten heaven, and been absorbed almost with your whole soul in worldly business! How few virtuous actions, and those few how spoiled by crooked ends, how mixed with faults and imperfections! Consider all this, and humble yourself for having lived so irregularly and in a manner so contrary to all reason.

III. Consider that if it is disgraceful to have led a life of this sort for so many years, it would be still more so to be minded to continue to lead it for those years that remain. It would be as though a traveller, on discovering that he had been going out of his way for several hours or days, were to take no trouble whatever to get back to it, but to go on in the wrong road. You must, then, seriously resolve to amend your past errors, to begin, though late, to live as you ought to have lived, and to make this right resolution without further delay. And you should do so chiefly because the length of your life is uncertain, and death may be nearer than you think; you ought not, therefore, to allow yourself to be overtaken by it, without the consolation of having served your Creator as you ought for at least one or two years. Now, then, if you have

[2] St. Luke xvii. 10.

till now failed in your duty, resolve from this time forth to perform it. You will have delayed all too long even if you begin immediately what ought to have been begun as soon as you had the use of reason. "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep."[3] "To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."[4]

IV. Consider, that the most fitting time for undertaking and settling this new and better way of life is that of these Exercises. And in order that by means of your greater care in making them they may the more further the end you have in view, remember that this year may be your last, and consequently these Exercises the last that you will have the time to make, as those of last year were to many who were in the habit of making them every year, and who died some months after they were ended. If they had foreseen this, oh how much more diligently and fervently would they have applied themselves to them, as a preparation granted them by God for their approaching death! Do you enter upon them exactly as though you knew by Divine revelation that your death was imminent; for whether this supposition is realized or not, it will always assist you to make them so as the better to amend your life, and consequently to meet death with greater readiness and gladness, whether it is to come to you soon or late. I might rather say that the longer it is in coming, the more readily and gladly will you meet it; for if it is well to prepare for a death that is near by a few days or months of holy living, it is better still to prepare for one that is far off by a holy life of many years.

V. Consider what are the points you must observe in order to derive a real and solid profit from your Exercises. They are mainly these five: first, to spend these eight days as if you were out of the world,

[3] Romans xiii. 11. [4] Psalm xciv. 8.

forgetting all its occupations and business, and allowing no thought in your mind, no desire in your heart but such as concern God and your soul. Secondly, to endeavour to understand rightly, and to fix deeply in your mind the truths of the faith which will furnish the matter for your meditation; for every one of them, when thoroughly mastered, is sufficient to enable you to make a wonderful change in your life, and to become a great saint. We see this in the Apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, in the great St. Antony, and in many others whose eminent sanctity had no other beginning than the clear recognition of some one eternal maxim, common, indeed, and known to all the faithful, but not equally efficacious in all; nay, rather barren of all fruit in the greater number, because only superficially apprehended, and not meditated properly. Thirdly, having in the daily meditations, recognized the duty of correcting some bad habit and of serving God more perfectly, do not be satisfied with breaking forth into merely speculative affections, such as: "In truth it is so: this vice is doing me very great harm: how careless I am in getting rid of it! how happy should I be if once for all I were really to determine to conquer it!" Do not rest in velleities like these, as though all the fruit of the truths you have been meditating consisted in them, but go on with a manly and resolute mind to what is practical, and add: "If, then, reason shows me that it is right and profitable to break off this bad habit, why do I not do so? Most surely I must break it off, and at once determine on the way of doing it, and I will not go further, I will not rise from my knees till this point is settled. For this purpose I will avoid such and such things, which foster it, and whenever an occasion of yielding to it presents itself, I will adopt such and such means as most suitable for gaining the victory over it, and every day I will make

a certain number of contrary acts—'I will pursue after my enemies and overtake them, I will not turn again till they are consumed.'"[5] Fourthly, fix on some particular sins and failings which are most prejudicial to you, and some virtues which you most require, so as to direct to the correction of the former and the acquisition of the latter the good sentiments, affections, and resolutions with which God shall favour you. Fifthly, reflect likewise on the causes which have occasioned your inconstancy as to the resolutions of former Exercises, in order to guard against your being prevented by similar hindrances from keeping those which you will make in these. Such, then, are the means which will chiefly help you to come with real profit, and changed "into another man," out of your holy retreat. Consider the importance of this, and make a firm resolution of doing so, at the same time begging our Lord to assist you with His grace, and trusting with strong confidence that by His help you will make these Exercises so as to reform your life more thoroughly and perfectly than you have done in former years and Exercises.

[5] Psalm xvii. 38.

FIRST DAY OF THE EXERCISES.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the knowledge of God, particularly with regard to His sovereign dominion over all creatures, and to their entire dependence on Him.

SUMMARY.

I. How unbecoming and pernicious is the forgetfulness of God which is commonly seen amongst men.

II. The greatness of God's sovereignty over creatures, and of their dependence upon Him.

III. How enormous a folly it is, when we consider His infinite superiority to all creatures, to make light of displeasing Him for the sake of gaining the esteem and goodwill of men.

IV. Right reason requires that, considering this our entire dependence on Him, we should bear ourselves towards Him with the utmost reverence, and be careful to do nothing to alienate Him from us.

I. Consider how unbecoming and pernicious a thing is the forgetfulness of God which is common amongst men. As to the first, nothing, surely, can be more unbecoming: for if every object merits consideration in proportion as it is noble, admirable, and most closely concerning ourselves, what object can be found so exalted and so capable of ennobling our mind as God, Who is the Summit of all being, the Measure of all excellence, the sum of all possible prerogatives? What is there so able to transport it out of itself in a rapture

of wonder, and to ravish it in a continual ecstasy of sweet amazement as His most marvellous, infinite, and incomprehensible Essence, in which as in another world every step leads us into new and ever newer scenes of truths so wonderful as to be scarcely credible, utterly unimaginable in their nature, transcending every rule and example? Lastly, what is there so close to us as He is, for Whose knowledge, service, and enjoyment alone we have received our being, without Whom we are nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing, Who alone can protect us in every danger, and help us in every need; Who, in short, is our First Beginning and Last End, our Creator, Master, Father, and Provider, our Hope, our Refuge, our Life, our Support, our whole Beatitude? And now, being all this, I leave you to draw the conclusion, how reasonable it would be that all men should think of Him continually, or at least make Him the chief, the dearest, the most habitual object of their thoughts, and therefore, how contrary it is to all that is right to see the majority of them so forgetful and careless of Him that they either never think of Him at all, or very seldom, and in a cursory way. Is it not a dulness of heart so base as scarcely to be believed? "Is this the return thou makest to the Lord, O foolish and senseless people? Thou hast forsaken the God that begot thee, and hast forgotten the Lord that created thee."[1] "Will a virgin forget her ornament, or a bride her stomacher? But My people have forgotten Me days without number."[2] But if this neglect of God is most insulting to Him, it does not, perhaps, do them any harm? On the contrary, it is more injurious and ruinous than words can say. For whence is it that spring the many and grievous disorders which we daily deplore in human life; the crookedness of ideas, the licence of appetites, the perversity of morals, the ease with which

[1] Deut, xxxii. 6, 18. [2] Jer. ii. 32.

men sin? Think about it as long as you please, you will find no truer, more universal, or more special reason, than the little thought and the still less knowledge of God. "There is no truth, and no knowledge of God in the land," is the complaint of the Prophet Osee. And what is the consequence? It follows immediately: "Cursing, and lying, and killing, and theft, and adultery have overflowed."[3] Yes, this is the root of all those poisonous shoots, this is the source from which flows that torrent of evil. The knowledge men have of the true and supreme good is very slight: to many it is as though God did not exist, so little do they regard Him, so completely do they live without thinking of Him. For if they thought more about Him, if they had a right conception of Him, how could they dare to despise and offend Him, to turn their backs upon Him, and to transgress His laws to His face? "If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory."[4]

Detest this forgetfulness, which is both so unbecoming, and so injurious; and exclaim in the words which St. Ignatius of Loyola was heard to utter with great feeling, in a state of ecstasy, "O my God, if men only knew Thee!" And if you find that in time past you have been guilty in this matter, resolve to make up for it in future by a more frequent consideration of the Object which is of all the worthiest and most important.

II. In order to fix some idea of God in your mind, consider that He is a Lord of infinite majesty, greatness, and power, of Whose necessary and uncreated Being there never could have been a beginning, and never can be an end; Who needs nothing, and lacks nothing; most perfect, rich and happy beyond our power of conception, Who, having for all eternity, before time was, led a Life abounding and overflowing with all possible good, through all which infinity of ages there

[3] Osee iv. 1, 2. [4] 1 Cor. ii. 8.

was no other being but Himself, did, some thousands of years ago, not urged by any necessity, but by a pure movement of free kindness, call forth from nothing, by His omnipotent will, all this visible universe of creatures of which we are a minute portion, and Who could make it in a moment vanish and return to nothingness, as easily as He created it; Who not only created, but continually governs it with a most absolute dominion, so that nothing in it can move, nothing of any sort can happen, without His concurrence and will. Thus, we have no good thing but what He has freely given, and freely continues to us, we can do nothing, and gain nothing but by His inspiration and help, but we are always in His hands, dependent on Him for everything, to be lifted up, or cast down, just as He pleases. "My lots are in Thy hands."[5] No dominion can be imagined so absolute as that which He has over us; and no need so extreme and entire as that which we have of Him at every moment.

Recall all this to your mind, and make a very strong act of faith about it, adoring that infinite Being of God with the most profound reverence, and declaring that you are nothing in His Presence. "My substance is as nothing before Thee."[6]

III. Consider, that in consequence of this truth all the most exalted, powerful, and considerable personages in earth or heaven are lower and of less account, in comparison of God, than the meanest scullion is when compared with the greatest earthly monarch. For the essential excellence of God, being infinite, surpasses the dignity of every monarch far more than he is elevated by his dignity above the dignity of the scullion, whilst, as regards the power to bestow favours or to inflict chastisements, God surpasses the greatest of kings far more than he does his meanest servant. From which

[5] Psalm xxx. 16. [6] Psalm xxxviii. 6.

it plainly follows that to prefer the approval and goodwill of any exalted personages to those of God would be a far more enormous folly than to prefer the approval and goodwill of a scullion to those of some great mortal personage. Therefore, as you would never think of doing anything to lower yourself in the regard of your sovereign, even though by so doing you should gain the applause and favour of all the scullions of his court, much less should you ever think of doing anything to lessen yourself in God's esteem and favour, however much it might advance you in the goodwill and opinion of all the kings in the world. And yet, how often have you committed this enormous and evident disorder by not fearing to displease the Sovereign Lord of the universe in order to give pleasure and satisfaction to even common and ordinary persons? What think you of such conduct? Can you deny that it is contrary to all prudence and reason thus to make more account of a miserable creature from whom you have so little to hope or fear than of the Most High God, on Whom depends all your happiness or misery? "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a mortal man, and of the son of man, who shall wither away like grass? And thou hast forgotten the Lord thy Maker, Who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth."[7]

IV. Consider, as the second consequence, that as it is not possible for any slave to be so bound to obey the commands, and so subject to the will of his master as you are to those of God, from Whom you have received your whole being and Who can at any moment deprive you of it; and as there never was a person so much in need of the help of another as you are of God's, without Whose liberal succour it is impossible for you ever to have or to do any good thing; you are required by all

[7] Isaias li. 12, 13.

reason to testify towards Him the utmost reverence, to do whatever he commands, to beware of displeasing Him and provoking His anger; and to act differently would not only be an enormous injustice, on account of the essential and rigid claim which He has upon your service in all things, but also the wildest insanity, because it would be to make an enemy of Him Who has it in His power to do you every sort of good if you are faithful to Him, and, if you provoke His anger to condemn you to the extremity of misery. Then, when you have fully understood and acknowledged this, consider how common this injustice and folly is among men; for, being so bound to God that they ought to obey and serve Him even if it were not for their own interest, nay, even if it were at some damage to their own interest, yet not even an interest so important as that of keeping Him their Friend Who is the Arbiter of all their lot, both temporal and eternal, is enough to make them pay Him the service and obedience that they owe Him, to keep them from offending Him, and from breaking His most holy laws before His very Face, in short, from behaving to Him as though He were a God of straw; who "have said in their hearts, the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil,"[8] "who looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing."[9]

Reflect, I say, on a manner of life so wicked, so foolish, so contrary to all reason, human and divine, humble yourself for having acted in this way, and declare before your Sovereign Lord that you will henceforth be more faithful in rendering what you owe Him.

[8] Sophonias i. 12. [9] Job xxii. 17.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the end for which God created us.

SUMMARY.

I. We were created for a very sublime end, that is to say, to reign and be for ever happy with God in heaven; and the obligation we are under to our Sovereign Maker must be measured by the greatness of this happiness.

II. The present life was not given us for the acquisition and enjoyment of earthly goods, but merely for the meriting and attaining that blessed end with the greatest possible profit; and this is the most important, or rather the only business about which we ought to concern and occupy ourselves all the time of our earthly life.

III. The only thing required of us for this object is fidelity, service, and obedience to our great Creator: how just, therefore, is it that we should render them to Him with great faithfulness for so surpassing a recompense, when, for the payment of a little money, the kings of this world receive from their courtiers so exact and faithful a service.

IV. If we do not do this, we shall not only miss our final beatitude, but be condemned to everlasting misery. So that we are placed between the two most opposite extremes—Paradise and hell—one or other of which must necessarily be our portion: the former if we serve God faithfully in this life; the latter if we are disobedient and rebellious to Him. How enormous, therefore, is the folly of those many persons, who, rather than serve God for sixty or eighty years in this world, choose to be condemned to eternal and intolerable misery in hell, when by serving Him during those few years, they might merit an eternal and perfect beatitude in Heaven!

I. Consider that God, notwithstanding His infinite superiority and absolute dominion over us, by reason of which we might well expect Him to make no more account of us than of the vilest slaves and meanest

worms, and so to take no kind thought whatever of us, does yet by the purely gratuitous movement of an unheard of and incomparable bounty, love us with more than a father's love, and deign to adopt us as His children; in all that He does He has nothing in view but our good, and He has formed us out of nothing, and given us this rational nature which we possess, for no other purpose but that we may be happy and reign with Him for all eternity in heaven, heirs of His glory, partakers of His beatitude, richer, happier, and more blessed than we can imagine; in a word, like Him, being, as it were, lesser gods: "I have said, you are gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High."[1] Yes, nothing short of this is the intention of God in your regard, this is the one end for which He created you, and towards which His loving Providence is continually leading you. Now, rise in spirit to the highest heaven and there remain awhile contemplating that most glad life there led by the just with God, free from every ill and full to overflowing of every good, its perfect peace, its abounding joy, the complete satiety of all their desires, in short, their beatitude surpassing all human thought and understanding. Then after having, in a manner, tasted it, say to yourself: "This is the destiny for which God created me, the inheritance which He offers me, the state to which He invites me and all men, calling from heaven to them: 'O sons of men, come, all of you, to live, and reign, and be eternally satisfied here with Me. It is for you that I have prepared this splendid, fair and happy abode, and there is nothing I desire so much as to have you all in it with Me, to be partakers of My everlasting joy. It is in the power of each one of you to come here. No one can hinder you if you desire to enter. Behold, I offer it to all of you. I call you all. I beg you all to accept My loving

[1] Psalm lxxxi. 6.

invitation. Do not be so foolish as not to wish to come. This is not a kingdom to despise. Come, all of you, come; Possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Oh, how great, then, is your happiness, not only beyond anything that you deserve, but even beyond anything you could have desired or hoped for. Is it possible that the Most High God condescends to love you so much, to exalt you so greatly, and that you, an insignificant man, now so poor and abject, and subject to so many miseries, will, in a few years, if you do not yourself prevent it, become a prince of Paradise, superior to all the monarchs of the world, equal to the angels, like unto God? Yes, it is possible—rather, it is certain, on more than human authority. It is not the prediction of an astrologer, a prophet, or an angel. It has been revealed to you in express terms by the Word, the Divine Word Himself, the Eternal, Infallible, Essential Truth. And for that reason it is to be more firmly believed by you than that you are a man living in the world. Repeat, now, again and again, the words which you say every day in the Creed, only with greater advertence and a more lively faith than usual: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." And now, what will you render to your Lord for the offer which He makes you of so high a destiny? Will you strip yourself of all your worldly possessions, in order to serve Him with less encumbrance? But what more would this be than if a beggar were to present his rags to one who clothed him in royal robes? Will you despise dignities, high station, and the honours of the world, in order to follow His counsels? But what comparison can there be between these things and that sublime height of glory to which He invites you. Will you give up the pleasures of this life for the love of Him? But they are no better than the husks of swine

when compared with the eternal plenitude of bliss which He has prepared for you. Acknowledge, then, that all the utmost efforts of your gratitude are nothing in the way of a due return for His wonderful liberality to you, and then see what enormous thanklessness it would be to deny Him anything that you can possibly do for Him, since it would be but a very small thing even if you did all that could be done for His service.

II. Consider, that although God created you to be eternally happy with Him in Heaven, yet He will not admit you to the possession of that heavenly beatitude without all merit of your own. He detains you, therefore, here on earth for a few years, in order that during that time, by duly serving Him, your Master, by keeping His commandments, and by doing acts of virtue, you may gain the eternal inheritance of His kingdom, and gain it with the utmost possible profit. Understand, therefore, and fix firmly in your mind this certain fact, that the period of your life in this world is not given you by God that you may amass riches, attain honours and dignities, enjoy pleasures and diversions, become a distinguished man of letters, an accomplished cavalier, a great prince: nothing of all this, but merely that you may inherit everlasting beatitude, and gain as much glory as possible in heaven; this is the one great business, the one great concern, the one great study, the only thing that is important, necessary or valuable, a thing which affects not any accident, but the substance; not this or that thing belonging to you, but your whole self; which if you manage it rightly no loss that you may suffer of anything else can harm you, and in which if you fail no other possible gain can profit you; all your thoughts, therefore, from morning to evening should be directed to this one point, all your other affairs and obligations, even those most closely affecting you should be subordinate to it, as means to their end. Endeavour, I say, to impress yourself

deeply with this great truth, so necessary yet so little understood by most men, whose whole mind and soul and thoughts and strength are employed from morning to night with their temporal establishment and advancement, just as though they knew of no life but this, and of no concern but to promote its interests to the utmost. This is why, if any one exhorts them to frequent the Sacraments, to spend an hour or so in the day in thinking of their eternal salvation, they answer that they have no time to do so on account of the quantity of business with which they are burdened and overwhelmed. Such an answer cannot be heard without indignation. Business! Your only business is to save your soul and attain everlasting beatitude; for this alone God placed you in the world: to this, above all things, or rather to the exclusion of all things, you ought to apply yourself. All the other concerns and employments of earth, in which you weary yourself, all the other plans, designs, and undertakings in which either private individuals, or princes and sovereigns of the world are engaged, no matter how grand, important, and desirable they may appear from a human point of view, are, unless directed and subordinate to this great end, no more than absolute trifles, "vanity of vanities," shadows of a reality, spiders' webs, and child's play; it is all a chasing of flies, a sowing in the sand, a running out of the right road—the veriest loss of time: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is all man."[2] Yes, this, this is everything, and he who knows this best is wisest and knows best what most concerns him, while he who does not know it, no matter how much penetration and prudence he may display in worldly matters, no matter how careful and successful he may be in his temporal schemes, knows nothing and has done nothing.

[2] Eccles. xii. 13.

III. Consider the justice, wisdom, and sweetness of this condition which God requires of us for the attainment of His heavenly kingdom, that, namely, of serving Him as obedient and faithful subjects during fifty, eighty, or a hundred years of this life. How could He have granted us easier terms, how could He have required less from us in return for so immense a boon? Even if He had insisted on our doing Him service till the end of the world, what proportion would there be between serving Him for some thousands of years and reigning with Him for ever? Nay, supposing He had exacted of us an everlasting service, to be followed by no reward, should we not be bound by all reason to serve Him with all fidelity, as the work of His hands, and therefore essentially subject to Him? How much more, when His commandments, in the keeping of which consists the condition on which the gaining of eternal life depends—"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments"[3]—are so easy, so necessary even, that if He had not expressly promulgated them, we should still be bound to keep them, merely out of regard to natural decency, and in order not to live like wild beasts. Let us think a little of the custom of earthly courts: was there ever a prince heard of who, when inviting any one to his service, promised him as a reward the inheritance of his kingdom? Surely not: the utmost payment he binds himself to is that of some thirty, fifty, or a hundred crowns a month in case he serves him well. And this is sufficient to induce multitudes, not only of his subjects, but of foreigners, to hasten eagerly to serve him, to perform exactly whatever he commands, to be at his beck day and night, to study how to guess at his wishes, and to forestall his orders by their prompt execution. It is sufficient, because these persons are

[3] St. Matt. xix. 17.

careless of their loss of liberty and the endurance of inconvenience for the sake of the honour they deem it to spend their lives in the service of earthly rulers. And shall we, to whom our heavenly Master, in return for a service which we owe Him even without payment, a very short service, and one consisting only in living conformably to reason, promises no less than the inheritance of His eternal and blessed kingdom, shall we, instead of accepting His conditions with humble gratitude, complain that too much is required of us, and that our liberty is too much restricted? O let us blush to entertain so unreasonable a thought, even for an instant, and declare to our Lord that all which is required of us is nothing when contrasted with the surpassing reward He has promised, and that, apart from all reward, we should esteem it reward, glory, and happiness enough to serve so worthy and so kind a Master.

IV. Consider that if you break this most just condition, of serving your great Creator and Lord during the time of your earthly life, not only will you lose eternal happiness, but be condemned as a disloyal subject, and a rebel, to eternal misery. Thus you are living between two most opposite extremes, namely, heaven and hell, and of inevitable necessity you must end in one or the other, that is, you must either be to all eternity most blessed in the former with the angels, or most miserable for all eternity in the latter with the devils. Which, then, of these two destinies will yours be? That which you please: the choice is in your hands. If you will serve God faithfully, heaven is infallibly yours, and no one can rob you of it; if not, hell will be your portion for ever. Now, who would believe that when to be eternally happy or eternally miserable is in the power of every one, there would be a single man out of the whole human race who would

refuse the former and choose the latter state? Yet all those who are now suffering in the abyss of hell are there by their own choice: they plunged into it themselves. They chose hell in spite of God, Who begged, Who entreated them to be saved, and to come and reign with Him in His heavenly palace. What is the reason of such madness? It is because they would not serve God for the few years of this life. Strangest of motives! Reason contrary to all reason! Is it such a great thing, then, to serve so good a God for fifty or a hundred years, that to avoid doing so man should choose endless misery, when the doing so would gain for him eternal beatitude? Marvel at this monstrous, this incredible blindness: for God is a Master so gracious, so kind, so loving, that, apart from either punishment or reward, His loveliness ought to be enough to draw all men to His service, and Paradise is so immense a good that the hardest slavery under any possible tyrant ought to be endured by every one for the sake of gaining it; and hell is so terrible an evil, that not only the keeping of God's easy commandments, but the most severe conditions possible ought to be most readily accepted by every one in his senses in order to escape it. Therefore, if we ought to think it most strange that there should be any one man whom either of these three motives is not sufficient to deter from sin, how much more strange must we think it—nay, how incredible, that there should be, not one or two, but innumerable multitudes whom all three together are not able to influence?

THIRD MEDITATION.

On five consequences which ought to result, in the nature of the thing, from the certainty of our last end, in every one who believes and rightly apprehends it.

SUMMARY.

I. We ought to derive from it a perpetual and imperturbable gladness amidst all the troubles of this life, and to consider that they are all a mere nothing in comparison of the eternal beatitude which we look for shortly.

II. Another consequence ought to be a generous contempt of all earthly pomp and greatness, as things so very inferior to the heavenly glory prepared for us.

III. Hence, too, there should result in us a great facility in keeping our minds always fixed on that most blessed end of ours, as on the object which concerns us more than all others.

IV. We should also draw from it a very firm resolution of determining to save our souls at any cost, and so to attain our final beatitude; so that we should look upon it as the greatest madness to commit sin, that is to lose so priceless a treasure, though by so doing we should gain all the kingdoms of the world.

V. Another result which ought to take place in us, as a consequence most proper to this consideration, is the invariable habit of being governed in all our deliberations simply and solely by a reference to our last end; always choosing what will help us to attain it, and always rejecting what we see is a hindrance to it, without any regard to worldly motives.

I. Consider, that having established this certainty of the blessed end for which we were created, that, namely, of reigning and being happy for ever with God in heaven, there ought to follow, in every one who believes and understands it, a perpetual and unalterable gladness in all the troubles of this life; so that the

soul, being wholly absorbed in the eternal and immense happiness prepared for it by God in heaven, should be in no way troubled by all the losses, misfortunes, and miseries that can possibly happen to it here below; and none of these things should have greater power to disturb its interior joy than two or three drops of wormwood would have to embitter a large vessel full of nectar, but amidst the most serious troubles it should sing joyfully with the seraphic St. Francis:

Such is the bliss I hope to see,
That every pain is joy to me.

Is not this, indeed, the effect usually seen in every one who has either attained, or certainly expects soon to attain some very great and extraordinary good fortune? Suppose that a man were very sad, troubled, and cast down in consequence of some injury, or loss of property he had suffered, yet if he were told on good authority that the Pope intended making him a cardinal on the next vacancy, would he not be seen to cheer up at once on hearing the good news? would he not banish from his mind all his former grief and be full of new gladness? If, then, to be told by a person of credit and veracity that the Pope certainly intended shortly to make him a cardinal is enough to drive all sorrow from the mind of a man, and efface all remembrance of his past troubles, how is it possible that the same thing should not take place in every Christian when he hears, from the lips of Him Who cannot lie, that most joyous promise; "Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom."[1] Be of good cheer, for your great Father in heaven has the most sure desire and intention of exalting you to His eternal and most blessed kingdom. Surely it is not possible, unless we have less faith in the declaration of God in the latter, than in the statement of a man in the former

[1] St. Luke xii. 32.

case; or unless we consider a cardinal's hat a greater good than all the glory and eternal bliss of heaven. All the more, as the former may be lost, either in consequence of the Pope changing his mind, or dying before the time, whereas it is not possible that God can change His intention of giving us His glory, and so far from death being able to rob us of it, it will but hasten our entering on its possession. Neither can it be objected that there is an uncertainty on our side, on account of the possibility of our sinning in the meantime, and so of God changing His present intention of giving us His kingdom, and refusing it to us: because though all that is quite true, the same uncertainty exists in the other case; for it is possible that we may commit some grievous offence which may induce the Pope to alter his former determination, and to withdraw the cardinal's hat with which he meant to honour us. Such a risk, therefore, as it is in the power of every one to avoid, would not at all lessen the joy caused by the promised cardinalate, supposing it certain on all other grounds: neither ought it to lessen the joy of our expectation of paradise, which will infallibly be ours, from whatever other side we look at it. For the certain knowledge that it is in our power to attain so vast a bliss, and that if we resolve firmly to do so no power outside ourselves can prevent it, is quite sufficient for a true and perfect joy.

II. Consider, that another consequence which ought to follow in every Christian, even of low birth, is a loftiness and generosity of soul, becoming one who knows that he was created by God for the everlasting inheritance of His heavenly kingdom, and who expects before long to enter on its possession, and who should, therefore, regard with repugnance and contempt all the pomp and grandeur which he can possibly imagine in this world, as toys and trifles quite beneath his

supernatural dignity, and say to himself when he sees them: "I am greater than these, and born to greater things." Away with this tinsel, these mean rags—far other glories and splendours, celestial, eternal, and divine are prepared for me. And in order the better to see how becoming this magnanimity of thought is in all Christians, that is in all God's adopted children, let us suppose a humble potter raised from his condition of an artisan to royal state and dignity, as was the case with Agathocles, King of Sicily, could we believe that in his new and exalted position he would retain the views, manners, and tastes which were his in his former mean calling? Would he go on practising it as formerly, endeavouring to draw as many customers as possible to his shop, and thinking it a great piece of luck to have made eight or ten ducats at the end of the week, by his daily gains? and would he be always speaking of mixing plaster and making pots, and thinking it a great distinction to be the best hand in the place at these mechanical labours? Who would ever suppose such a thing? On the contrary, all his study would be to act and think in a noble and princely manner; he would so demean himself as though he had never been employed in that mean business, and never recall without shame and repugnance either the mercenary calling he once followed, or the paltry gains he made by it, or the poor little credit and the absurd little emulation with other artisans which resulted from it. If he were to act otherwise, he would be despised by every one, as unworthy of the change of fortune which he was so unfit to bear, and which he disgraced by such unbecoming conduct. And we may gather from this, how unworthy we too should be of that incomparable dignity to which God has exalted us from the lowness of our earthly nature, if, instead of entertaining thoughts suitable to it, that is to say such

as are all of heaven and God, we were to continue to have our hearts and minds steeped in the mire from which we were formed, and were not ashamed to prize and admire the poor splendours of this low world, which are, in comparison of the new dignity conferred on His children and heirs by God, far more despicable than the handiwork and earnings of any poor artisan compared to the occupation and the wealth of any sovereign, even if he were ruler over the whole world.

III. Consider, that, as a consequence of this principle, it ought to be the most constant, habitual, and joyful occupation of our minds to think about the beatitude of eternity, to meditate on its greatness, to long for it and to consider what are the means of attaining it with the greatest certainty and profit. Is it not evident? Would any one who has on hand a law suit concerning a hundred thousand crowns, or any great interest of the kind, give no thought to the subject? Is it not the thing which most commonly occupies his mind, so that he cannot be diverted from it even when otherwise employed? Is it not the first thing that occurs to him on waking in the morning, which remains with him the greater part of the day, and often robs him of rest at night? And why is this but because he looks upon it as an affair of much importance and which very greatly affects his interests? But what can be a more important interest, or one which ought more to concern us, than our final beatitude? Is it not that for which alone we were made, in which is involved our chief good, so that if successful we have gained everything, if unsuccessful we have lost everything? How, then, should we not be always remembering it, and always keep it before our minds as the object we hold dearest, most familiar, and most attractive?

IV. Consider, that this thought of our last end ought not to be merely speculative, but accompanied by a

firm, constant, and unchangeable resolution of attaining it at every price and by every means. This is what it comes to: happen what may, let the heavens fall, or the earth crumble to pieces, let me lose fortune, friendship of men, reputation, life, everything, I must save my soul. I must gain paradise. I must ensure the blessed possession of God: "I will save my soul." That is certain—it is a point which is settled for ever, and can never be called in question. Therefore, should the devil set himself to tempt us, as he tempted our Lord in the desert, by displaying to us "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," and saying, "All these will I give thee," at the price of our committing some sin which he suggests to us, we ought to despise such a temptation as utterly ridiculous, and incapable of seducing any one but a madman, since what he offers is so very small a thing in comparison of what he demands of us. Let us, therefore, reply to the treacherous tempter: "Well, then, Satan, since you would have me disobey God in order to yield to you, let us weigh, one against the other, the reward which I am to gain by yielding to you, and that which I shall have if I obey Him. If I sin, you promise me the empire of the whole world for a hundred years: if I do not sin, He promises me the kingdom of heaven for infinite ages. What think you of these two things? Can you be so audacious as not to acknowledge the evident preponderance of the latter over the former? Or can you think me so foolish as to consider it a good exchange to barter heaven for earth, and eternity for a hundred years? Away with all your gifts or promises of earthly goods! 'Thy kingdom be accursed with thee;' for the beatitude which God promises me in heaven far surpasses all thought, all riches, all price."

V. Consider, that we ought, in conformity with this resolution, to be guided in all our particular elections

and deliberations simply by regard to our last end, without stopping to consider whether the thing in question is honourable or dishonourable, pleasant or unpleasant, useful or injurious to our temporal interests, but only looking to whether it is a help or a hindrance in attaining our eternal beatitude, and then rejecting it if it is a hindrance, no matter how much honour, gratification, or worldly advantage may accrue to us by means of it; choosing it if it is a help, in spite of every human reason against it. Thus for instance, if a peerage, or a still more exalted position, were offered to me, I must not consider the honour I or my family and relations would gain by it, but shutting my eyes to all that, say to myself: "Will this dignity help me to save my soul more easily, and with a greater amount of merit?" And if I see that it will not do so, I ought, without further consideration, to resolve, as a thing self-evident, and requiring no further discussion, to refuse it positively: because the rule for every wise election is, in one word, our last end. When a pilgrim comes to a place where several roads cross, he does not think of asking persons who know the country which is the easiest, but only which leads to the place he is going to, and when that is pointed out to him, he immediately takes it although he sees that it is in many parts very rough, difficult, and uncomfortable. And just as he inquires for and chooses that one road, leaving for it another which may nevertheless be easier and pleasanter, so we, too, whose whole life on earth is a pilgrimage to heaven, ought to consider and take trouble about nothing in all the different actions, fashions, or paths of life which meet us, first one, and then another, all day long, except as to our being able by their means to reach our great end; and so, always choosing, not those which are most honourable, easy, or agreeable, but those which most surely lead us to it.

Strive, therefore, to perceive and know, with the greatest possible clearness, how naturally each one of these five consequences is to be deduced from the principles of the preceding meditation, and how conformable, therefore, it is to all right reason, that as every Christian holds the latter to be certain, he should also take the former as his rule of life.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

How opposite the life which is commonly led by men is from that which, according to the preceding meditation, they ought to lead.

SUMMARY.

I. The lives of men are in every particular different from what, as a consequence of believing in their last end, they ought to be.

II. This difference is most unbecoming, especially when we consider that it is so common as to have become the usual custom, and to appear rather natural than blamable.

III. Every one ought to reflect how it is with himself: and if he finds that he has not hitherto lived as his last end requires him to do, to determine seriously on reforming this matter.

I. Consider, whether the way in which men commonly live is such as you have seen in the last meditation that it ought to be according to the requirements of their last end. Do you not think it is true that the great majority live as though they knew nothing of the eternal beatitude of heaven, for which they were created? Where is that gladness which no misfortune can affect, that ought to be produced in them by the sure promise of so near and so immense a blessing? so that "looking for the blessed hope and the coming of God's great glory," they make light of all temporal adversity, and like the faithful of old take "the loss of their goods joyfully, knowing that they have a better and lasting substance?" My God! every little loss, every trivial attack on their honour, the failure of any insignificant plan disturbs and depresses them, their lives are embittered, they lose their sleep, their hope,

their courage, neither is the prospect of the infinite blessings which God has prepared for them sufficient to sweeten those few bitter drops. Where is the loftiness of mind becoming the adopted children of God, and the heirs of His heavenly Kingdom, which should make them despise all the paltry splendour of this low world as so much mire? Despise it as mire? Why, they gaze upon it spell-bound and open-mouthed; they speak of it with admiration, they consider it the height of bliss, and when they hear of any one being elevated to an office of distinction or of having gained some rich inheritance, they exclaim: "What good fortune! How happy he is! I wish such a piece of luck would befall me." Are not those who speak thus ignoble souls that have degenerated from their supernatural dignity, and not only ignorant, but unworthy of that lofty station to which God has elevated them? And where is that sweet and loving thought of heaven which ought always to dwell in their minds, as of the place for which alone they were made, which is to be their everlasting home—their only good? Can such dulness be believed? they hardly even remember it, there is nothing they think of so little. Nay, they go so far as to consider it a melancholy and unwelcome subject. Let us go on to ask whether they have immovably implanted in their hearts the right resolution to be saved, cost what it may, so that in comparison of that most important, because eternal interest, they regard all the riches, pleasures, honours, and kingdoms that can be possessed on earth as less than nothing? Would to God that this were so, as by all right it ought to be! But how many do we see every day carelessly gambling away eternity, their souls, and heaven for the sake of a trifling gain, a vain punctilio of honour, a poor piece of human respect, a transient pleasure and other worthless

motives of the same sort! What shall we say of the standard by which they are guided in their elections and deliberations? Is it, as you have seen that it should be, their last end only, so that when they have to choose between different objects, that is to say different means to this end, they regard and care for nothing but the exact relation they bear to it? Think it over: whatever may be the matter under discussion, the first consideration is: how will this affect my reputation? how shall I best provide for the interests of my family and the gratification of my relatives? What are all these things? Mere secondary and accessory matters. Consider that which is of main importance, and the end of all besides, to make sure of eternity and to save your soul. And this is precisely the last thing about which they think. Our honour must be maintained, our interests must not suffer, nature must be gratified: when these points are settled, we will find some way of arranging about our souls. Am I exaggerating things too much, or are these the ways of thinking and acting commonly seen in the world?

II. Consider how perverse, unreasonable and contrary to all that is right such a way of life is, how opposed to reason in every particular, and therefore all the more so as a whole: especially since it is not one or two persons, but nearly all the human race of all ages, ranks and conditions, young and old, gentle and simple, learned and unlearned, clerics and laity, who live thus perversely. And being so common and ordinary a thing, belonging to every time and place, no one feels surprised at seeing it; indeed its madness and wickedness are scarcely noticed, it has become a custom, and is looked upon as something almost belonging to the nature of man which it is useless to hope or try to alter. Now, if you consider all this well and seriously,

you cannot but exclaim with feelings of sorrow and astonishment: "But what sort of a world is this that we live in? What a Babel of confusion! What a chaos of discord, madness, and disorder, in which most men, indeed nearly all, live so blindly, so irrationally, so insanely, that if only one in a thousand did so, it might well be considered a miracle of strangeness. 'O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart, why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?'"[1] We see with what force and eagerness all bodies turn towards their centre, for example, stones towards the earth, and rivers to the sea. If you hold a rich piece of silk suspended in the air, under a stone which is falling from a great height, does it check its motion? No! it forces its way violently through the rents of that rich and soft fabric which is interposed between it and the earth, to seek the goal appointed for it by nature, although very often it will find there only some hard rock on which it will be dashed to pieces, or some muddy swamp where it will be covered with mire. Or look at a river: it may flow between banks shaded by trees, enamelled with flowers, adorned with gardens and palaces, or even over sands of gold such as those of Pactolus were said to be: but will all this splendour and beauty avail either to stop its course or even to make it less rapid? Let some poet answer, who loves to embellish his descriptions with such fancies. He will tell us that the river, unchecked by any of these things, seems to sing: On—on away! to the sea! there only is my home, my centre, the goal I seek. And thither it pursues its career, with unchanging speed, straight to its end, heeding neither the ill savours which sometimes taint its sweet waters, nor the furious storms by which it is continually tossed hither and thither. So that it is true of even inanimate creatures,

[1] Psalm iv. 3.

whatever may be their appointed end, that only do they seek, in that only do they rest: while man who, being endowed with reason, ought to go more straight to his end than all other creatures, is yet among them all—is it not wonderful beyond belief?—the only one who does not do so, the only one who deviates from his last end at the slightest attraction he meets with, and whose actions tend to any goal rather than that which ought to be for him the only one. And what excuse can he assign for so strange and contradictory a conduct? Will he say that other creatures act from a mere instinct of nature? Why, then, should not he too act from a mere instinct of reason, which is his only distinctive nature? Will he say that their movements are of a necessity, that they are not, like him, free and masters of their actions? But why should so noble a distinction as liberty and the being master of himself only serve to render him more perverse in his actions, that is to say, meaner and uglier than those creatures, which are the lowest in the whole universe, because they are by nature wholly servile? No, there is no excuse to shield him, there is no reason that he can assign for his perverse way of living but that he has, of his own free will, abandoned all use of reason and sense.

III. Apply these considerations to yourself, that is to say, examine yourself as to the way in which you have been living with reference to these five preceding points; and if you find that you too, having before you the immense beatitude offered you by God, which should be enough to make you beside yourself with joy, have so often given way to melancholy at every little failure in temporal matters; that without a thought of your priceless dignity in being a child and heir of the Most High, you have stooped to bestow your admiration on such mere rags and rubbish as the

greatest magnificence of earthly rank and pomp may well be called in comparison of the heavenly riches; that instead of keeping your eyes always fixed upon your last and most blessed end, you have turned your back upon it, and hardly given it a passing glance; that, instead of thinking all the goods of this life well spent in attaining it, there is not one of the least of these things that you have not again and again preferred to it; if, lastly, instead of making it the only rule of all your deliberations, and always choosing what most conduces to it, you have, on the contrary, been guided merely by consideration and affection for things which are meant to be means towards it, and have almost always chosen what most served to gain them, however contrary to the end itself; if, I say, you too have lived in this perverse manner, repent now at last of these errors of which you have been guilty, and which, from their gradual growth and from seeing them so common in others, you have not clearly perceived, and say within yourself, full of shame and penitence:

"This sort of life which I have hitherto lived is most irrational, most unworthy of a wise man. I have been led by the example of companions and evil custom to go on blindly out of the right road so many years, without ever reflecting on what was required of me by motives of justice and my own true interest. What then, must I do in future? Go on living as I have done till now? How can I, when I know that such a life is contrary to all that is right, and more worthy of a brute than of one who acts by reason? Shall I go on being guided by my former opinions and maxims? How can I, when the light of faith and of reason shows me that they are false? I have gone astray long enough—nay, far too long, always wandering farther and farther from my true and only goal. Why, then, seeing my error, should I not correct it? Why,

perceiving that my steps have led me out of the right road, should I delay any longer in retracing them?" Argue with yourself in this way, and, in conclusion, resolve upon that new and better mode of life which you have seen in the preceding meditation ought to be led by all who firmly believe that they were created for everlasting beatitude, and that this earthly life was given them for no other purpose but to study how to attain that sublime end with the greatest possible profit. Resolve, therefore, always to keep that end before you as the only rule of your whole life, and the only object worthy of being prized by one who appreciates things at their just value; so that in comparison with it, all other temporal objects and interests may be as nothing in your eyes.

SECOND DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the superiority of the good and evil of the future, over those of the present life.

SUMMARY.

I. Their superiority in point of duration.

II. Their superiority in point of greatness.

III. Their superiority in point of universality.

IV. How foolishly those act, who, notwithstanding this superiority, show by their practice that they prefer the good and evil of the present, to those of the future life.

V. Every one who commits a mortal sin is guilty of this folly.

VI. Every one who is guilty of a venial sin or an imperfection commits the same folly.

I. Remember that our faith teaches us, with the utmost certainty, that man has two lives; the one, that is the present life, temporal, which will have an end after the lapse of a few years: the other eternal, which will begin when the former is over, and which will never end; and that each of these lives has its good and evil things, those of the former transitory, and ending either before, or at the longest, at its close; those of the latter lasting and eternal, like itself. Then, having settled this point, endeavour to fix firmly in your mind this most certain truth, that the good and evil of the future life, by reason of their infinite

duration, surpass, not by a hundred, or a thousand, or any determinate number of times, but simply with an immeasurable superiority, all the good and evil of the present life: for every good and evil increases in proportion to the length of its duration, and there is no possible or imaginable proportion between a finite and an infinite duration; therefore we must conclude, as a consequence that cannot be doubted, that the very smallest good or evil of the future life outweighs, beyond all comparison, the very greatest good or evil of the present life, and ought therefore to be preferred to the latter by all who rightly balance the merits of things; just as an infinite number of pence incomparably exceeds the greatest fixed number of sovereigns, and ought therefore to be more valued by every sensible man. And as it would be an enormous mistake, or rather sheer madness, if any one were to choose to lose an infinite number of pence for the sake of gaining any fixed number of sovereigns, so no less does he err, and as madly does he decide, who having to choose between enjoying some very great good for as many years as this life can number, and a much less good for all the endless years of the next life, prefers the former to the latter; and the same holds good when the election lies between suffering an ordinary headache for all eternity, or acute pain, such as that of the stone, for a hundred years only. And although it may not be very easy for the imagination to apprehend this consequence, because of its being too feeble to conceive what is infinite, yet the evidence afforded by the above line of argument ought to be sufficient for the full acquiescence and consent of the understanding.

II. Consider that the good and evil of the future exceed those of the present life, not only in their length and extent, but also in their intensity and greatness. Let us imagine a man as rich, powerful, healthy,

glorious, and happy as it is possible to be in this world, and compare him with the very least of those who are in possession of the beatitude of heaven: every one must see that the honour enjoyed by the one among men on earth is far eclipsed by the glory the other has with God and all the citizens of the great world of heaven; that all which the former can do by his own power or that of his subjects, is far less than the latter can do by that of God, and that the health and riches and ease and pleasure of the one are valueless, and vanish utterly away if we compare them with the impassibility, the superabundance of every good, and the ineffable joys of the other. And is it not plain to every one that the lowest degree of the Beatific Vision surpasses in excellence and value all the riches, power, honours, pleasures, and every other natural advantage that can be enjoyed on earth, because all these are not sufficient, as the former is, to render the possessor absolutely and completely happy? In the same way we should reason as to the superiority of the evils of the one side over those of the other; for there never has been and never will be poverty, destitution, misery, and suffering in this world equal to what the damned suffer in hell. Endeavour, therefore, to understand this truth as clearly as possible and then draw the conclusion, that as, even if any good or evil of the future life were surpassed in greatness by those of the present, yet it ought to be considered absolutely greater on account of its eternal duration; so, too, supposing it were only to last as long as the other, it ought still to be preferred, because of its being intrinsically greater.

III. Consider another superiority of the good and evil of the future over those of the present life, which is this: that when any one in this world enjoys any particular good he is not therefore free from every evil,

neither does he at the same time enjoy every other sort of good; and that the man who here suffers any evil is not on that account deprived of every good, nor does he suffer at the same time every other possible evil. Whereas the good and evil of the future life are so free from every mixture of their contraries that no sort of evil can ever be added to any of the good, nor any sort of good to the evil; and they are so bound up together that no good can be enjoyed in that life without all others accompanying it, nor any evil suffered without all others being suffered with it. And this is the reason: that in that future life our lot is of necessity either Paradise, which is a state of pure and perfect beatitude, or hell, which is a state of pure and perfect misery. There is no other final state besides these two, and therefore as it is impossible that any one in attaining the former should not also attain every possible good, so too, is it impossible that any one falling into the latter should not suffer every possible evil. Hence it follows, that as we must set against every good or evil of this life not one single good or evil, but all taken together of the other, therefore as any one good, such, for example, as pleasure, is more desirable when united to riches, health, power, honour, and every other sort of good, than if considered by itself, so the pleasure (and the same is true of every other good) enjoyed by the Blessed in heaven ought to be preferred to that which is enjoyed on earth; and as every evil, pain, for example, is more to be shunned when united with poverty, disgrace, and all other evils, than when it is alone, so are the torments endured by the damned in hell (and you should reason in the same way as to every other evil) to be more dreaded and avoided than any that we can suffer here.

IV. Gather up all these reasonings together, in order to give them greater efficacy, and conclude from the

great force each of the three arguments we have been considering has to make you despise every good or evil of the present life when contrasted with those of the other, how much greater force the three together ought to have, and consequently how incalculable would be the folly of any one who, contrary to the urging of these great and weighty motives, for the sake of enjoying some good or escaping some evil of this life, did not mind losing the good and incurring the evil of the next, where both are so incomparably greater than here. Can it be conceived that any one should be so great an enemy of his own interests that when it is in his power to possess a good, eternal in duration, supreme in intensity, and universal in every kind, he should prefer one which is defectible, scanty, and restricted to one kind; or so blind to the necessity of avoiding what is for his hurt, that, rather than suffer an evil which is very short, moderate, and only of one kind, he should choose to endure one of infinite duration, most grievous weight, and which comprises all other evils in itself? If, then, you are obliged to confess that the good and evil of the future incomparably exceed those of the present life, both in duration, magnitude, and universality, you must also confess that you cannot possibly commit an imprudence, or rather a madness, more contrary to your interests than by practically preferring the latter to the former when the two come into competition; for this is to prefer the transitory to the eternal, the less to the greater, and each single good or evil by itself to the whole of them together in the full totality of every different kind.

V. Consider that in every mortal sin men commit they are guilty of this madness; for no one can sin grievously without in that very instant losing Paradise and condemning himself to hell, and the reason for his thus sinning is either for the sake of acquiring some

good or escaping some evil of this life. Let us suppose that the motive which urges him to sin is some good, such as the gaining of a rich inheritance by fraudulent means. Before committing the fraud he is placed between two goods as unequal as possible, namely, between an earthly inheritance on the one hand, and a heavenly one on the other; he cannot possibly enjoy both, and therefore he is compelled to choose one and reject the other. Certainly right reason suggests that he should choose the latter; for if he takes the former he can possess it but for a few years, and all that he gains will be only an income of four or five thousands a year, and this possession will not endow him with health, beauty, learning, and all other good gifts, as well as riches. Whereas, in choosing the latter, he is perfectly certain of enjoying it for ever, throughout eternity, and of possessing in it a capital which is of inestimable value for it is God Himself, with all His infinite treasures, and, by virtue of that possession, of being for ever delivered from all possible evil, and enjoying every possible sort of good. Now, what does he do? He says (literally and exactly, if not with his lips, at least practically and by his acts), "Let who will choose the inheritance of heaven, I prefer the earthly one." "But how is that possible, when the latter, regarded from every point of view, is incomparably better and worthier of being chosen?" "No matter, it may be so. I do not care, I choose the former." I ask you whether a more foolish, blind and irrational election can be conceived? And it is the same thing when the motive is to escape some evil, as, for example, to avoid the dishonour which may be the consequence of refusing a challenge. Here, too, you see the man, before making his resolution, placed between two evils, both of which it is impossible to avoid, and one of which he must therefore necessarily choose if he would

not incur the other, that is to say, between the disgrace of cowardice which he will bring upon himself in the world by refusing to fight the duel, and the disgrace of being the lost and abject slave of the devil, which he will merit in hell by consenting to do so. Now, the latter disgrace being necessarily eternal and without end, the former temporal and limited to a few years; the latter very grievous, founded on truth, and to be manifested at the last judgment to the whole universe; the former slight, vain, and known to but a few; the latter combined with extreme poverty, intolerable pains, and every kind of terrible evil; the former compatible with perfect health, abundant riches, and the fulness of all other good things; who does not see that, unless he is perfectly mad, he ought cheerfully and without any delay to escape the latter by choosing the former? And yet—what marvellous insanity!—rather than be considered mean and cowardly in one city or province for twenty or thirty years, a bad character, which, though it will certainly diminish his honour, will not prevent his still being able to live at his ease in the possession of many good things and enjoyments, he prefers being condemned by God at the last day, before all creatures in heaven and on earth, as a base shameful, infamous wretch, to the everlasting prison of hell, there to suffer at the hands of the devil torments such as would never be inflicted, not only on the lowest slave, but on the meanest animal, with the certainty of having to endure this state of extreme abjection, and of all imaginable pains and miseries which belong to it, while eternity endures, unregarded and unpitied by all, vile in the sight of the whole world, and hateful even to himself. Wonder at this madness, and remembering how often you, too, have allowed your judgment to be perverted by it, resolve never in future to make so foolish an election. "Understand, ye

senseless among the people, and you fools, be wise at last."[1]

VI. Consider that even if you think you are living without sinning mortally, you still cannot flatter yourself that you are entirely free from this folly, as if it belonged exclusively to sinners and worldlings. Rather, if you look well into your conduct, you will see that you often commit it, whenever you are guilty of any fault, or neglect any good work suitable to your state, and to which God has particularly inspired you, rather than deprive yourself of some human gratification, or in order to avoid some annoyance. In both cases it is evident that you make more account of the very small temporal good or evil which induces you to commit these faults and neglect these good works, than of the eternal and unspeakable reward which you would earn in heaven by avoiding the one and performing the other. Humble yourself, then, and learn how necessary a right idea and clear knowledge of the future eternity are in order to lead a good life here, and resolve, therefore, that you will in future meditate upon it more seriously, and be guided by no other rule in all your opinions and elections.

[1] Psalm xciii. 8.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the malice of mortal sin, by reason of the grievous injury it does to him who commits it.

SUMMARY.

I. Mortal sin deprives the soul of its spiritual beauty, and renders it more hideous than any monster.

II. It deprives it of all its nobility, and makes it viler than any animal.

III. It deprives it of the friendship of God, so that He hates it, and regards it as His enemy.

IV. It deprives it of all right to the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

V. It condemns the soul to hell, and holds it suspended by a slender thread over that terrible gulf.

VI. It is, even in this life, a foretaste of hell, filling the soul with disquiet, trouble, and remorse.

I. Consider that mortal sin renders the soul more hideous, revolting, and horrible to behold than any body covered with the most disgusting ulcers, or disfigured in any other strange and unnatural manner, so that if it could see itself in a mirror, it would be horrified and unable to endure the spectacle. And this for two reasons—first, because of the inherent and essential hideousness of the sinful act itself, which, being intrinsically bad, disgraceful, contrary to all that is right, and more suitable to a brute beast than a reasonable creature, deprives him who commits it, *ipso facto*, of all his interior symmetry, and disfigures him in the same way that a face would be disfigured, in which the eyes, nose, or mouth were in the wrong place, and out of natural proportion. The second reason is that when

sin enters into a soul it instantly banishes from it that sanctifying grace, which was its whole supernatural beauty, and without which it is no less odious and abominable in the sight of God than a corpse, devoured by worms, and falling to corruption, would be in ours, so that the lamentation of Jeremias may well be applied to it : "How is the gold become dim, the finest colour is changed . . her Nazarites were whiter than snow . . their face is now made blacker than coals."[1] This being so, suppose that, in order to keep men from sinning, God were to make every one who was guilty of calumny or any other mortal sin, suddenly turn as black as an Ethiopian, or become deformed in every limb like some monster, or a demon when he takes a visible form. Do you think that in that case men would sin as easily as they do now, or that after having unhappily fallen into sin, they would, as so many now do, put off abandoning it for months and years? I am sure they would not. They would say, reasoning like wise men, "It is not worth my while, for the sake of a vain and foolish fancy, to become so monstrous that no one could bear to look on me." And I think, too, that if any man did sin, through human frailty, he would not delay to efface the deformity he had contracted by sinning, as quickly as possible by means of the sacrament of Penance. Now, it is quite certain that a similar metamorphosis does take place infallibly in the soul of every one who sins, that it takes place every time that he sins, and that it continues as long as he remains in sin. If, then, an external bodily deformity—supposing that it were always the consequence of sin—would, from the dread we should have of it, make us more slow to commit sin, and more anxious to get rid of it at once, why is not the same effect produced by a similar—nay, a far greater deformity, which we know to be inflicted

[1] Lament. iv. 1, 7, 8.

by every sin on the soul, that part of us which is so much nobler than the body, and the beauty of which ought therefore to be much more precious to us? Is it that the latter is less visible than the former would be? But the very contrary is the case. For, in the one case, it would be hidden from the eyes of others by going into the country, or shutting oneself up in the house, but, in the other, it is impossible by any means to hide it or to prevent its being continually, both night and day, a hateful spectacle in the eyes of the saints and angels, and, which is more important still, of God.

II. Consider that mortal sin deprives man of the preeminent and supernatural dignity of Divine grace, which renders him incomparably nobler, more distinguished, more exalted in the sight of God not only than all earthly monarchs, but even than all the angels, regarded as to their natural excellence. I say, that this unparalleled nobility is taken from him by sin, which, from being as he was at first, superior to all natures that are or could be created, makes him more despicable and mean than a toad or any other vile animal. To understand this better, descend, in thought, into hell, there to contemplate the terrible sufferings of those wretched lost ones—their inconsolable tears, their agonized shrieks, their despairing struggles. God sees all that without being moved to compassion. "But how can it be?" you will ask. "Oh, where is His father's Heart, that He does not deign to compassionate those miserable beings whose ceaseless and fearful torments are enough to melt the very stones?" Would you know the reason? It is this: He has no compassion for them because, being in sin, they are no more in His eyes than the vilest animal, such as the viper, would be in yours if you happened to see it mortally wounded by a stone or stick. Suppose you beheld it in the

agonies of approaching death, now all shrunk up, now convulsively writhing here and there, so that you could have no doubt that its sufferings were very great; yet so far would you be from pitying it, that you would stop to look at its dying struggles as a curious and pleasant spectacle. Neither would you be afraid that any one would think you inhuman and cruel for doing so, for you would say that, after all, it was a viper, a hateful and venomous creature, and that there was no reason for your troubling yourself in the least about its sufferings, however acute they might be. This, then, is the condition to which man brings himself by sinning, a condition so vile, that whereas before God regarded him, if I may say so, with reverence, as superior to every other nature, He now regards him as a beast, unworthy of being cared for or thought about, no matter what he suffers. "Man, when he was in honour, did not understand; he has been compared to senseless beasts, and is now become like unto them."[2] And yet these are persons who pride themselves on their high spirit, who stand upon their point of honour, and who strive so obstinately for more brilliant titles and posts, who cannot endure to abate an inch of their dignity or to be treated with less consideration than suits their importance. High spirit! sense of honour! where are they, when to satisfy a low appetite, they are so shamefully base in mind as to be indifferent to losing all their nobility, and to degrade themselves, not only to the lowest rank among men, but to the condition and level of brute beasts?

III. Consider that sin deprives him who commits it of the friendship of God, that inestimable privilege which, by reason of the perfect interchange of all things which is required between friends, makes us partakers of all the omnipotent strength and infinite

[2] Psalm xlviii. 13.

riches of God, thus making us, if I may say so, gods ourselves, of whom it may be declared: "I have said you are gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High."[3] Nay, as though it were not enough to rob man of so great a good, it plunges him into the guilt of being in God's disfavour and enmity, so that that Sovereign Lord, by Whom so short a time ago he was cordially loved and cherished, now cannot look upon Him, entertains a mortal hatred towards him, and holds him to be his sworn enemy. And who can rightly express how sad and tragical a change this is? We know that the friendship even of an earthly king, although he is but a weak mortal man, subject, like ourselves, to all the common infirmities of our nature is so much thought of that several persons have died merely from the grief at losing it. This was the case, to give but one instance, with Don Alvaro Bassano, Marquis of Santa Croce, whom King Philip II. of Spain had appointed admiral of the naval Armada he sent out against England, and who, when the King, being displeased at reports he had heard to his discredit, said to him, "Marquis, you make an ill return for the affection I have shown you," was so affected, that he fell sick on reaching his house, and was shortly carried from his bed to his grave. And yet the King had not declared him to be his enemy and a rebel, nor did he hate him as such; he had not even entirely banished him from his favour; he had merely cooled towards him. If then to fall some degrees in the regard of an earthly prince is considered so great an evil, and produces so excessive a grief, what ought the sinner to think of his state, with what horror should it fill him, when he knows certainly that from being in the close friendship of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, he has incurred His positive enmity, and that

[3] Psalm lxxxi. 6.

there is not a moment in which he may not say to himself: "I am now the enemy of God, that God Who holds my life and death in His hands, Whose anger none can ever fly from or escape, Who is able to punish me whenever and in whatever way He pleases; yes, it is this very God, Who now regards me with abomination, counts me as a rebel, and holds me in the utmost hatred." What thought can be conceived by the mind of man more gloomy, more terrible, more fatal than this? And how can any one, knowing this, remembering it, and hearing it repeated by his conscience, help shuddering and being paralyzed with fear?

IV. Consider that sin deprives the soul of that right to the kingdom of God, which it possessed before sinning: for just as it is certain that before sinning, that most blessed inheritance belonged to it by right of justice, and could not be kept from it by any one, nor refused to it even by God Himself; so, too, it is infallibly certain that by sinning the soul has made itself incapable of possessing it; it has staked and lost it, according to that declaration of the Apostle: "Do not err: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate . . . shall possess the kingdom of God."[4] No; they shall not possess it; it is impossible; that blessedness is not made for them. So long as they remain what they are, they must not hope to gain it. And what is it they lose? It is not a bargain, a patrimony, a principality, or any other perishable and earthly good: but a heavenly kingdom of eternal glory, of perfect beatitude. And yet, how do sinners slight it! how indifferent they are about it! If they hear judgment given against them in some important law suit, if their hopes of some dignity fail, if they hear of the loss of a vessel, in which the chief of their capital was embarked, how afflicted they are,

[4] 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

how depressed and disturbed! The wound is incurable: all the spices of Candia, all the balsams of Arabia are not enough to soothe their grief. Nay, suppose the misfortune is much less, and that they lose at cards a hundred gold pieces, how do they bear the loss? They cannot hide their vexation, they go home full of gloom, and cursing their ill-luck; they are ill-tempered to their wives, and scold their servants for the least thing; they cannot eat, and can hardly sleep at night. Now, suppose that these same persons, who are so sensitive to every temporal loss, fall into sin, which is the same thing as saying that they lose heaven, their souls, and God. Do they feel that greatest and most grievous of losses as they ought, or even as much as they feel those lesser misfortunes? So far from it; they show no sense whatever of that which is alone important, and for which they ought to be inconsolable, but go on, calm in mind and serene in countenance as though all were well, saying, as it were, "I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?"[5] They are like the king who went on amusing himself with dances and festivities while his enemies were gradually depriving him of his possessions, and to whom one of his generals shrewdly said that he never saw any one lose his kingdom so merrily. Compassionate this twofold blindness, which makes them both lose their chief good so easily, and feel the loss so little.

V. Consider that sin, besides making you unworthy of heaven, condemns you also to hell, keeping you in continual danger and readiness to fall into it. You may picture your condition to yourself by imagining a man hanging by a thin, worn rope over a whirlpool a hundred fathoms deep and full to its lowest depths of venomous serpents. What do you think would be his feelings? Do you suppose he would be inclined to

[5] Ecclus. v. 4.

joke and laugh and sleep? Rather, spell-bound, trembling, and horror-struck at so terrible a risk, he would do nothing but look, now at the rope by which he was suspended, now at the precipice beneath him, saying to himself: "Alas, how little is required to break this weak support by the weight of my body! And in that case what would become of me? How should I fall headlong! What a crash it would be! How should I lie there, helpless and miserable, to be devoured by those hideous and ferocious creatures, which are waiting for me open-mouthed!" Now that is precisely the state of every one who is out of the grace of God. He hangs day and night by that frail thread of our mortal life over the fearful mouth of the gulf of hell. And if, as may easily happen, and as does happen every day to so many, that thread should break by a stroke of lightning, the shock of an earthquake, the suffocation of a catarrh, a fit, or any other sudden accident, then, without any help or hope of escape, he must fall down headlong, certain of having to dwell for ever with demons more terrible than serpents or the most ferocious beasts, buried for ever in eternal death. And in such a condition is it possible for him to live cheerfully, to think of diversion and enjoyment, to take a single hour's sleep? Wretched man, never to reflect on the danger you are in! "They are a nation without counsel and without wisdom: O that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end!"[6]

VI. Consider that sin anticipates hell even before death, in the soul which admits it, robbing it of all its peace, and filling it with disquiet, terror, and remorse, so that it has not an hour of security, tranquillity, or true happiness. When a man feels himself urged by concupiscence to sin, the delusion of his imagination

[6] Deut. xxxii. 28, 29.

causes him to take an inexplicable delight in the sinful object, sufficient to make him happy in indulging in it. We will grant it. But this delight, however great it may be, is over in a few moments, leaving the soul, which thought to find in it an enjoyment almost amounting to beatitude, full of regret, shame and confusion; and, oh, with what long and intense bitterness must he pay for the brief sweetness he tasted! Bring before you, then, these six grievous injuries, and whenever sensuality suggests that the pleasure to be found in gratifying its sinful appetite is very great, do not wait to argue the point, but say: "Granted that it is great—exceedingly great—far greater than it appears, still is it worth my while to buy it so dear? If a dish were before me more delicious than nectar, and I were ever so much inclined to eat of it, yet if I were told by a credible person that it was tainted with a mortal poison, I should certainly not venture to take a mouthful, for I should hold it sheer madness to eat what would cause my death for the sake of a momentary pleasure I should feel in swallowing that morsel. If I did so from excessive gluttony, everybody would say that I had lost my senses. How, then, shall I venture to commit sin, however delightful it may appear, and however strongly I am inclined to it, when my faith assures me that to taste it is the death of my soul? 'In what day soever thou shalt eat of it thou shalt die the death.' And if my desire of its sweetness should have more power to induce me to taste it than fear of its poison to deter me from doing so, should I not, in the opinion of every one, and even by my own confession, be guilty of deliberate madness?" "Can a man taste that which when tasted bringeth death?"[7]

[7] Job vi. 6.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the malice of mortal sin with respect to the tremendous chastisements with which God has punished, and does punish it; thus showing how much He hates it, and how much we, too, should do so.

SUMMARY.

I. The chastisement with which God punished the pride of Lucifer, and of the angels who followed him, casting so innumerable a multitude of glorious spirits from Heaven into the gulf of hell for that one sin. Here, too, besides inferring from this the exceeding malice of sin. we may likewise observe with what unspeakable mercy God has treated us; for, whereas He would not bear with one single sin in the angels, He has pardoned so many in creatures so inferior as ourselves.

II. The chastisement with which He punished Adam's disobedience, condemning him and all those who should descend from him till the end of the world, to all the manifold, various, and grievous miseries of this life for that single sin.

III. The chastisement with which He punishes every sin in the next world, condemning every one who dies in it to an eternity of torment in hell, and this with the utmost justice; nay, not even exercising the strictness of exact justice; whence it follows that sin is an evil greater and more to be dreaded than hell itself.

IV. The chastisement of the bitter Passion and death with which He punished our sin in the Person of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; that Person so infinitely loved by Him, and of such infinite value, that it is a more horrible thing for Him to suffer a single blow than for all men and angels to go into perdition.

I. Consider the punishment of Lucifer and of the angels who were his followers. They were more innumerable than the sands of the sea; they were most glorious spirits, the highest creatures in the whole

universe. And yet, how did God deal with them, when being blinded by pride, they refused to submit to Him? He did not consider their vast numbers, nor their exalted nature, nor the singular gifts of wisdom, power and beauty with which He had so marvellously endowed them, but, forgetful of the special love He had borne them, He made them, for that first and single sin, demons instead of angels, and in an instant cast them down, all together, from heaven into the depths of hell. What think you of so severe and terrible an act of justice? Think of it for a while, and argue thence how great the malice of sin must be, when God, Who is mercy and goodness itself, punishes it so rigorously in creatures so numerous, so noble, and so dear to Him. Imagine some great sovereign condemning thirty princes of his kingdom to be all beheaded, one after the other, in the public square. What a terrible and tragical sight it would be! How much it would be talked of all over the country! And what feelings of astonishment and horror the story would excite in all who heard it! All these noble personages, the flower of the nobility, and the glory of the kingdom, to have their heads severed by the axe in one day and place! Every one would certainly say that it must be some crime of very great magnitude that moved the king to so extraordinary an act of justice, more especially if he were not cruel or tyrannical by nature. But what are thirty nobles of earth in comparison with all those millions of angelic spirits, each one of whom, according to St. John Chrysostom, is superior in dignity of nature to the whole visible universe? And He condemned them, not to death by the axe, but to an eternity of torment. Does not this fill every one with horror, making them exclaim: "Oh, sin, what a monstrous evil must thou be, to have forced God, that most

merciful Father, to a sentence of so much severity upon so many of His choicest and dearest creatures." You may, and ought also to acknowledge, in this punishment of the apostate angels, not only the exceeding malice of sin, but the incredible clemency with which God has treated you, since, whereas He had no mercy on them for one single sin, He has forgiven you so many. It is certain that the first time you offended Him, justice demanded that you should be smitten by death, and sent to suffer the penalty due to you for all eternity in hell: and you would have no more right to complain than the man who is sent to the gallows for the first murder he commits. Still more should you see this to be the case, because, having thus dealt with the angels, why should He have more regard for you, who are so inferior a creature? Nevertheless, God, in His exceeding goodness, forgave that first offence of yours. And what have you done? Instead of wholly devoting yourself to His love for so great a favour, you have repeated the offence. "What! you have again offended Me, after so gracious a pardon, such as was not granted even to the angels? Now, then, there is no more mercy for you. Depart—depart to the hell which is doubly your due." Such surely was the sentence which you should have received from God at least for the second sin. Even in this world if a murderer, after the punishment of death had been remitted, were to be guilty of another murder, there is no prince so merciful that he would venture to beg or hope for forgiveness from him. Yet has God still had patience, and pardoned you that second time also. That surely must be the last time you ever offended Him, and that He ever forgave you. Was it so? No. You went on recklessly to the third offence, and He did not punish it; you added a fourth, that, too, He pardoned; and so on with the fifth and

sixth, and all the countless sins, which, after being forgiven so often, you again and again, and more and more audaciously committed. Oh, surpassing patience, such as was never seen, not only in a king towards his rebellious subjects, but in a father to an undutiful child! Oh, marvellous mercy! which strikes the angels with astonishment, and makes the devils rage with envy; for those proud spirits cannot endure that God, the common Father of both, did not bear with one single offence in glorious creatures like themselves, while He suffers so many every day from a vile worm like man without indignation. If, then, this partiality, as I may call it, in God for you causes in them feelings of anguish and fury, what feelings of love and gratitude should it cause in you! You should marvel how a God, Who, being absolute Justice, hates sin above all things, can have so often borne with it and left it unpunished in you. And you should also acknowledge that since all the evils of the present life are as nothing when compared with hell, so to endure all possible temporal sorrows and sufferings for love of Him is a very inadequate, or rather, no return at all, for so vast a benefit as the being spared the punishment of hell as He has so often spared it to you; and that therefore you would but ill correspond with the infinite obligations you have thus contracted to Him, if anything in the world were to seem so hard to you that you should hesitate about undertaking it, or if you should think you had done enough, or made Him an adequate return by undertaking it. But, above all, you should be confounded at the strange and monstrous ingratitude you have shown Him. For, after He had with wonderful kindness forgiven your first offences, and the eternal death due to each one of them, which, if you had not lost all feeling of humanity and justice, and were not more savage than a wild beast, would compel you to

love so gracious a Master, and make the very thought of ever again offending Him an impossibility, you have not only begun offending Him afresh, but have made the forgiveness He granted you before—that is to say, His own wonderful goodness to you—a reason for offending Him more boldly, thus wronging not only Him Who has been your benefactor, but actually *because* He has been so. Is not this an excess of baseness detestable beyond words? unexampled and outrageous, not to be found in wild beasts, of which not even the devils are guilty, for which hell itself is too slight a punishment, and for which the Divine Justice would have to invent new and worse torments in order to chastise it as it deserves?

II. Consider the punishment of Adam's disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit. How did God visit it? He instantly drove the criminal from the earthly paradise, deprived him of all the wonderful privileges of original justice, condemned him to death and to all the many and grievous penalties of our mortal life. But there was more than this: for that one sin it was His will that the whole human race which was to descend from him till the end of the world should be under the same sentence. Does a punishment so long and so universal seem a small thing to you? Surely not, if you examine it in detail. Call to mind all the troubles, griefs, pains, and sufferings both of mind and body that you have endured from your earliest childhood till now. Gather them all together in imagination, and then, to increase the horror of the spectacle, add to this mass of grievous but still individual miseries all the destructions of cities, desolations of provinces, and massacres of populations, which have been occasioned in all ages since the beginning of the world by the violence of earthquakes, the virulence of pestilence, or the fury of war. Then,

having contemplated this fatal and terrible accumulation of evils, say: All these calamities, public and private, are nothing but the consequence and punishment of the first sin: that is the thing to be principally abhorred in them. If it had not entered into the world, no evil could have entered it, there would be no cause for sorrow in the life of man. And thus, lastly, it will be easy for you to draw the conclusion how shocking, pestilent, and terrible a poison mortal sin must be, since a single drop of it has been enough to poison all ages, and to deluge the whole world with so fatal a flood of sorrow and tears. This is a conclusion very little understood by the world at large, but which it is most important to understand, and which, when once rightly apprehended will prevent your ever being guilty of such inconsistency as to commit sin for the sake of avoiding poverty, pain, disgrace, or any evil of this life. Rather will that very horror of poverty, pain, and disgrace urge you to dread, detest, and avoid sin, which, as the original cause of these and all other human miseries, ought to be dreaded, detested, and avoided more than all of them. And, therefore, you will consider that to commit it for the sake of escaping any of these which are among its painful results, would be no less a folly than it would be for any one to throw himself into the fire in order to escape being scorched, or annoyed by the smoke.

III. Consider how God punishes sin after death, that is to say, with terrible and ceaseless flames of hell, which will burn for all eternity. And if this is a punishment which you would certainly consider most horrible if you had to endure it for a year only, nay, for but one day, you may imagine how fearful it is beyond words to have to do so for countless ages. Then, having settled this point, go on to reason with

yourself thus: It is absolutely certain that God does not punish our misdeeds beyond their deserts; for if no good man could be guilty of a similar injustice, how can it be supposed that it could be done by Him Who is perfect and essential Justice itself, especially since He could not derive the smallest advantage from so acting, because of the infinite plenitude of His beatitude? It is, therefore, quite certain that since He has decreed hell as the punishment of every mortal sin, its everlasting torments are justly due to it, and cannot, therefore, be believed to be a greater evil than itself. Nay, theologians go still further, and declare that so far from its being possible for God ever to punish sinners *ultra condignum*, that is to say, with a punishment beyond what they merit, He punishes them *citra condignum*, that is to say, less than they merit, when He sends them to hell. And the conclusion from this doctrine is, that the evil which the damned committed whenever they sinned is greater than that which they will endure when burning in hell for all eternity; so that the former, when put into the scales with the latter, not only balances, but far outweighs it, notwithstanding the tremendous heaviness of its eternal torment. And the inference from all this is, that sin being a greater evil than hell itself, you are required by right reason to abhor and shun it more than hell itself; so that if you were under the necessity of incurring the one or the other, you ought to choose to fall into that terrible pit of everlasting punishment as being a less evil than to admit one mortal sin into your soul, an argument which plainly shows you what you should resolve upon, if you would act according to right reason, when you are obliged either to sin or to suffer some evil of this life: for if, rather than commit sin, you ought to be willing to burn for ever in hell, how much more ought you to be willing to suffer

some evil in this world for a few years rather than commit it? For every one of such evils, nay, all of them together, when compared to an eternity in hell, can scarcely be called more than a trifle, a dream, a mere shadow of evil. Oh, men, "deceitful in the balance," when will you set your false judgments right? Behold what sin is—sin, which you commit almost as "a jest," and drink in "like water": it is a plague so horrible that, to estimate it rightly you ought to regard it as a greater evil, and therefore to fear, hate, and avoid it more than the terrible eternity of hell itself.

IV. Consider how God punished our sins in the Person of His own Incarnate Son, requiring that a Person of infinite merit, and possessing the same nature, majesty, greatness and power as Himself, should, in payment and satisfaction for the sins of others, be plunged into an immense abyss of ignominy, suffering, and pain. We know that Jesus Christ, being the God-Man, is a Person of such infinite value that we ought to think it a more horrible, strange, and tragical an occurrence, and one that should fill us with greater horror for Him to receive a single blow than for all men and angels to be damned together. How much greater, then, should be our horror, how much more bewildering our astonishment, to see a Person of excellency and majesty so surpassing, with His whole body torn by thousands of lashes, His brow pierced by a cruel crown of thorns, His face struck with violent buffets and covered with foul spitting, made a jest by the vilest rabble, treated worse than a slave or a beast, so that He could say: "But I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people,"[1] and at length, after every sort of savage cruelty and shameful insult, nailed upon the infamous gibbet of the

[1] Ps. xxi. 7.

Cross, and breathing out His most holy soul in unutterable torment; and all this solely because He took our sins upon Himself as our surety. Reflect upon this tremendous severity of Divine justice exercised upon a Person of such a dignity, and thence conclude how extreme God's hatred of sin is, since He would not suffer it in Him Who was incapable of committing it, and had only, through excess of charity, taken on Himself the sins of others, that is to say, in the sacred Person of His only-begotten and infinitely beloved Son, without avenging it on Him in a manner which no one could ever have imagined ought or could be done, and which could not be believed except on more than human authority, and is not to be thought of but with the utmost horror and astonishment. Then, having drawn this conclusion, see whether the malice of the sin you have committed is a light thing, and whether you ought ever to admit into your soul this terrible monster, which, after having emptied heaven of so many of the angels, filled the world with misfortunes so serious, and kindled a furnace of unquenchable flames for the eternal punishment of those who commit it, at length caused the Author of life to die upon the Cross covered with shame and wounds and anguish.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

On the malice of mortal sin with respect to the gravity of the offence offered to God by him who commits it.

SUMMARY.

I. To sin mortally is to commit a grievous injury and offence against God, because it is a violation of His laws, a thing greatly displeasing to Him, and a preference of created goods to Him Who is the Infinite Good.

II. The enormity of this offence with regard to the Person offended, Who is a Lord of infinite greatness and goodness.

III. The gravity of it is increased by the offending person being a creature so miserable, that he is nothing in respect of the God Whom he offends.

IV. Its gravity and iniquity are greatly aggravated by consideration of the concomitant circumstances, namely, of the time and place in which, and the instruments by means of which it is committed.

I. Consider that to sin mortally is to disobey God, and that not in any matter whatsoever, but in a matter which He specially insists upon, namely, those laws by which He declares it to be His will that we should chiefly obey Him, and the transgression of which extremely displeases Him as being in an especial manner contrary to His essential justice; therefore to transgress them is to lose, *ipso facto*, His grace and and our filial relation to Him. It follows, therefore, that no mortal sin can be committed without thereby grievously dishonouring and displeasing God. And this for three reasons: first, on account of His authority over all creatures as Master and Lawgiver, to which the sinner refuses submission, an offence resembling

that which is committed against his sovereign by every subject who breaks the laws which he has issued under pain of death; secondly, on account of His exceeding abhorrence of sin, which the sinner utterly disregards, provided he does but gratify his irregular appetites, thus testifying an extreme contempt of Him, such as would be testified by a son to his father in committing some disgraceful action which he knew would greatly displease him; lastly because His relation of sonship and friendship with God, which ought to be preferred to all the goods of this world, is so lightly esteemed by the sinner, that he does not mind losing it for the sake of some earthly attraction or gain. This may be compared to the wrong which would be done to some great and powerful king by a peasant girl whom he had chosen for his bride, if she were to love and honour him less than the meanest of his scullions, and to forsake him and those royal nuptials for the society of so base a suitor. How, then, can man try to excuse his faults by calling them an indulgence of passion, unreasonable, if you will, but having no power to injure God or to diminish in the least His perfect beatitude, and at which He cannot, therefore, be greatly displeased, or not bear with from human frailty? Vain and empty is such an excuse. For if, by sinning, he does not injure God, he casts off His allegiance, tramples on His laws, cares nothing for displeasing Him, renounces His friendship, refuses to be His son, and, in short, pays Him no more reverence than if He were an idol from which neither good nor evil was to be expected, and which every one was at liberty to treat as ill and disrespectfully as he likes. Every sane person may judge whether such conduct is a slight insult and injury to God's adorable Majesty, and whether it merits to be tenderly dealt with by Him and passed over without much displeasure, as youthful

levity, natural frailty, or a necessary evil; or whether on the contrary, it ought not to be execrated, held in abomination, and severely punished as an enormous dishonour, a grievous injury, and a crime of intolerable depravity.

II. Consider, that this offence, which, as you have seen, when regarded according to its nature, would be a very grievous one even if committed against a man—for instance, against a king, a father, or any other mortal person deserving of reverence and love—is aggravated in an infinite degree when committed against a God to Whom infinite love and reverence are due. For it is evident that the same injury is considered more or less grievous, according to the degree of reverence and love due to the person to whom it is done. So that in the same measure that the person of a king exceeds in dignity that of a peasant, are insolent words addressed to the former a greater affront than they would be if addressed to the latter; and we should measure the greater enormity and disgrace of a blow given to a father than one given to a companion by the greater reverence and love due to the former. Now, what personage can be conceived as meriting so much reverence as God, Who infinitely surpasses all mortal personages in excellence of nature, in greatness, in power, and supremacy of dominion, and therefore merits such reverence in a degree infinitely surpassing what is due to all others? Who is able rightly to conceive and estimate the singular excellence of His eternal, necessary, immutable Being, which depends on no one, is in need of no one, Who lacks nothing, and to whom no good thing can be added—a Being, that is to say, which possesses by identity everything that can be desired for a complete plenitude, nay, for an incomprehensible infinity of perfection? In a word, His being is so superior to all that is outside of Him,

that all this great machine of the universe, composed of creatures so many and so excellent, is, in comparison of Him, viler and more despicable than an atom flying in the air is when compared with it; so that if that whole universe were to be destroyed in His honour, it would be a far smaller matter than for an atom to be destroyed for the good of the universe. Are we not bewildered with wonder and awe when we reflect on His greatness, which is so immense that He fills with Himself and includes in Himself the whole universe, so that there cannot be either within or without it any imaginable space in which He is not always present with all His immensity; or on His power, which is so illimitable and universal, that for the instantaneous creation of a thousand new worlds twice as vast as this, there needs only His willing that they should exist; or on His supremacy over the whole created universe, which is so absolute and despotic that there is no creature in it, great or small, which is not entirely subject to Him as the first beginning and last end of its being; which does not constantly depend on Him, or which could, for a single moment, subsist, or move, or have any good without His will? How can we speak of a Sovereign of such transcendent excellence? How can we rightly think of a Majesty so surpassingly wonderful? What reverence is so deep, what service so lowly, as not to be due from us by every right to such a Master? Nay, rather, is it not all incomparably less than His dignity demands? Looked at in this light, it would be nothing if we spent our whole time in adoring Him unceasingly, if we sacrificed our lives for Him a thousand times, if we annihilated ourselves to serve Him. Then we must add to all this the utterly incredible courtesy and graciousness with which this Lord of infinite greatness and Majesty stoops to hold intercourse with us, worms of earth, and His meanest

slaves, so that He even counts us as His friends and adopts us as His children. We must add, too, His liberality, so loving, so disinterested, so beyond all that we could ask or hope for from Him; for, as though it were a small thing to have created us, and made all the creatures in the world for our use, His desire of making us as happy as possible is so insatiable, that He offers to every one of us who will accept it, the very best thing He has or could have to give, by inviting us all, from the highest to the lowest, to be partakers of His everlasting glory, heirs of His heavenly kingdom,—nay, by making Himself and all His infinite treasures our possession. Lastly, we must remember that He is an object so wonderfully, surpassingly, and unimaginably beautiful, that it is impossible for those who behold Him by intuitive vision, not to be rapt out of themselves with astonishment and joy, so that for all eternity they gaze upon Him in ecstatic ravishment, consumed with the ardour of their love, and knowing no other beatitude than to remain always motionless and absorbed in that most blissful Vision of God. Such, then, is,—nay, I should rather say, thus only can we dimly picture to ourselves—the greatness and the beauty of that Sovereign Lord Whom we offend by sinning. Dwell upon His attributes one by one, and when you have formed the most lofty and magnificent idea possible of them, draw this final conclusion, that if the malice of every offence is to be measured by the dignity of the person offended, then mortal sin being, as you saw in the first point, a grievous offence against God, and God being, as you were shown in the considerations of the second point, a Master worthy of infinite reverence and love, it follows that the malice of every mortal sin must be infinite, and no one can be surprised that God, Who knows the malignity most perfectly, should punish it with everlasting torments in

hell; and if at first sight this seems surprising, the reason is that our limited intellect not being capable of understanding how infinite a Good and how infinitely desirable God is, it is also incapable of clearly measuring by that standard how infinite and infinitely detestable an evil it is to offend Him.

III. Consider that this injury, which, to put an impossible case, if it were committed against God by another god, equal to Him in nature, would nevertheless be infinite with respect to the Person offended, acquires, if I may use the expression, a greater infinity of malice with respect to the offender, namely, yourself, an insignificant man, who but yesterday were nothing, and are now restricted within the limits of a very small individual being, incapable of doing or having any good thing of yourself, full of imperfections, laden with miseries, subject to a thousand wants; poor, weak, liable to sickness, frail and mortal, always tending to corruption, and not being for a single moment secure of life. You cannot deny that these are the characteristics of your natural condition. Now, then, place yourself, such as you have here seen yourself to be, in contrast with your great Creator and Lord, and compare with His necessary, eternal, uncreated, and entirely self-existent Being, your own, which is accidental and of yesterday, which you received merely as an alms, and which is entirely dependent on others; compare with His immensity, which is illimitable and always present in all imaginable places, your littleness, which is hardly perceptible and restricted to a space of a few feet; compare with His Omnipotence, to which nothing is impossible, so that a simple act of His will is all that is required for doing everything, your weakness, which requires so much time and labour, so many aids and instruments, even for the accomplishment of those few and insignificant works which it is capable of

performing; compare with the plenitude of His perfection and beatitude, wanting nothing and infinitely greater than can be conceived, your poverty, lacking so many things, and subject to innumerable imperfections. What are you in such a comparison? You may form an idea of it from thinking how infinitesimally small a thing you would be when compared with all possible creatures, or even with all the men and angels existing in the universe. For if, in presence of that vast multitude, no one would think about you or make any account of you, or notice whether you were present or absent, so that you would be no more regarded than a fly or an atom, how much less, more contemptible, and how mere a nothing you must be in presence of the infinite Being of God, before Whom all possible creatures are less than atoms, and hardly distinguishable from nothing? "All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity."[1] If, then, you ought to be so humiliated at the knowledge of so infinite an inequality, so annihilated, as it were, before God, that prostrate on the earth, trembling and awe-struck, you would not so much as venture to lift your eyes towards His incomprehensible Majesty, how strange and unbounded a temerity must yours be, when, regardless of what you are and Who He is, you have dared to resist, insult, and offend Him? Is it not insolence unexampled, monstrous, unheard of, utterly intolerable, and hardly credible, that when He, the Sovereign Lord of the universe, seated on the lofty throne of His glory, was being adored by all creatures who stood before Him in trembling awe; served with the profoundest reverence by countless bands of angelic spirits who gazed on His immense greatness and beauty, spellbound and consumed with love of Him, and singing

[1] Isaias xl. 17.

before Him, never-ceasing hymns of praise—you, a vile worm of earth, reared yourself up from your native mire, and were not afraid, in the sight of the whole world, to contend with Him, and to behave to Him with a want of respect, or rather a positive contempt and defiance, which you would not have dared to show towards an earthly master of the same nature? And how has it been possible for the angels, nay, for even inanimate creatures, to endure patiently your insane crime, and not all of them to unite in destroying the vile clod of earth, the monstrosity of nature, the off-scouring of humanity, who dared with intolerable boldness and shamelessness to insult the ever-adorable Majesty of their Creator and Lord?

IV. Consider how greatly the malice of this offence, already so extreme in regard both of the Person offended and of the offender, is aggravated by the concomitant circumstances, namely, the time and place in which, the instruments by which, and the motives from which it is committed. For where is it that the sinner offends God? To His face, and before His very eyes. And this is the height of insolence, such as no subject ever showed in breaking the laws of his sovereign; for every one who ventures to do so always takes care that it shall be out of his sight, and is never bold enough to act in this way in his presence. Whereas the sinner, although he perfectly well knows that God is everywhere present with him, everywhere sees and watches him, transgresses His laws at his pleasure, and is not afraid to commit, before the eyes of the Supreme Lawgiver and Judge, crimes of which he would not venture to be guilty before another man. And at what time does he do so? At that very time when God is every moment preserving and maintaining his existence with Fatherly love and Providence; that is to say, he offends Him not only before His eyes, but in His very arms, as

though a son, when his father was in the act of affectionately embracing him, were insultingly to spit in his face; the action would be vile at any time, but doubly disgraceful at that moment.

Again, what are the instruments he makes use of in sinning? His eyes, tongue, and hands, his free-will, his possessions, his health and strength. From whom has he received all these but from God? Are they not all marks of His Divine beneficence, and gifts bestowed on him by God's liberal hand? And do you not think that offences committed against so gracious a Giver are immensely aggravated by being committed by means of His own gifts? What should we say of a soldier to whom his sovereign had given a splendid sword, and who used it to stab him? Should we not detest him as a monster of ingratitude, as the enemy of all humanity? Such a one is the sinner. God, Who could have caused him to be born, like so many others, blind, dumb, lame, or mad, has, in His free and special kindness, provided him with all the necessary aids and instruments for doing with ease all that he pleases; and he abuses these very powers and faculties which have been so graciously bestowed upon him, to offend their Giver. Lastly, from what motives does he offend God? Is it to escape some tremendous evil, such as death, or to gain some extraordinary good, such as a kingdom? Even if this were so, and the motive were as strong as this, still the malignity of offending Him would be infinite, because every created good, however great and exalted, is surpassed, at an infinite distance, by God; so that to prefer it to Him cannot be considered an offence of less than infinite malice. What, then, can be said when the things preferred to Him are, as is commonly the case, mere nothings, insignificant trifles, and paltry interests, such as a little gain, a transient pleasure, the gratification of a friend, or a vain punctilio of honour?

What a degree of contempt is this, not only to offend Him, but to offend Him so readily and for the most trifling reason! There is not a day when He might not repeat the complaint made of old by the pen of Ezechiel; "They violated Me for a handful of barley and a piece of bread."[2] O my God, great, supreme, and infinite, has the contempt of your incomparable Majesty, the indifference to your inestimable perfections, reached such a pitch as this! Why do we shudder on hearing of the eternal punishment of hell decreed to the sinner, when the gulf of torment is a small thing, and eternity itself too short to punish, as it deserves, malice so execrable?

[2] Ezech. xiii. 19.

THIRD DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

Application to ourselves of the preceding meditations on the malice of mortal sin.

SUMMARY.

I. To call to mind the principal sins of our past life.

II. To consider the miserable condition of our soul during all the time that we were living in sin, remembering those most pernicious effects which we have already seen in the second meditation of the preceding day to be its consequence in every one who commits it; and hence conceiving sentiments of horror proportionate to so terrible a recollection.

III. To consider the baseness of the act we have committed every time that we have sinned, renewing the considerations of the meditation immediately preceding this, concerning the malice of sin as it is an offence against God.

IV. To excite in ourselves, from these considerations, an exceeding confusion and the deepest humility, so that we may esteem ourselves unworthy of every good, and deserving of every evil; and that, no matter how grievous an injury may be done to us, we may not venture to complain as though we were receiving a wrong, but rather acknowledge that every suffering, short of hell, is less than what we have deserved.

V. To make the strongest and deepest act of contrition possible; believing most surely that even if we were to die from the vehemence of the sorrow we conceived, it would yet not be so great as is merited, and even required by one single offence against God.

I. Call to mind the principal sins, whether of thought and interior act, or of word, or of deed, by which you

have offended your Heavenly Master from the time when, in your early childhood, you attained the use of reason, marshalling them all before you in their terrible array, and considering the vastness of their number, and the special hideousness of each one: "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul." [1]

II. Reflect upon the misery of your condition when you were living in sin, renewing on this account the considerations already made the preceding day; namely, that you were then more hideous as to your soul than any monster, so that, could you have beheld yourself in a mirror, you would have been filled with horror: you were viler than any brute beast; you were hateful to God as a rebel and an enemy to Him: you had lost all right to the inheritance of His heavenly Kingdom, and were hanging, suspended by a thin thread, over hell. Go over again the preceding considerations, and conceive from them feelings of horror, such as would be experienced by a traveller who, when day broke, should perceive that, without seeing or knowing it at the time, he had been walking all night on the narrow verge of a tremendous precipice, over which it was a miracle that he did not fall at every step: saying within yourself: "Oh miserable me! where was I? What a time of death was that! what days of darkness, what fatal hours! Had I then died suddenly, as has happened to so many, and might so often have happened to me too, where and what should I now be? Lost for ever, in everlasting sorrow, in everlasting misery: forsaken by God and by all creatures, without hope of remedy, help, or comfort. And, being at such a pass, I never gave it a thought, I slept in peace, I was able to jest, to take my pleasure, to laugh! What blindness, what stupidity! Infinite thanks be to the Divine

[1] Isaias xxxviii. 15.

mercy, which has made me at length open my eyes and quit so miserable a state. But how shall it be for the future? Shall I be so insane as to return to it again? Oh no! not for anything on earth. Rather would I die a thousand deaths: it shall never be so, never shall such a thought even cross my mind. The evil is too enormous, and the thought too terrible, that even for a single moment I have been in such a state."

III. Consider how vile, unworthy, shameful, abominable, and execrable an act you have committed every time that you have sinned, inasmuch as each of your sins was a grievous offence against God: that is, an express disobedience to the laws He has most strictly enjoined, by which you have rebelled against His supreme dominion, and repeated, in deed if not in word, that speech of the stubborn Pharao: "Who is the Lord, that I should hear His voice?"[2] a thing which is utterly detested by Him, and of which He has declared that nothing can more displease Him, for it is as much as to say: "It matters little that God is offended, so long as I can take my pleasure." And lastly, it is to esteem and love Him, Who is the Infinite Good, less than goods of no value, such as are those which are enjoyed in creatures. For, in order to take the satisfaction afforded by sin, you made nothing of losing His friendship and ceasing to be His child, thus showing that you esteemed the former a greater good than the latter; as though you said: "It is true, Lord, that if I gratify this unreasonable desire of mine, You will cease to regard me as a friend and a child: but that is a light thing: I consider it better to take this gratification than to continue to be Your friend and child. If these favours of Yours cannot be enjoyed together with sin, keep them for others; as for me, I do not think so much

[2] Exodus v. 2.

of them as to abstain, for their sake, from the satisfaction to be gained by sin."

And, in order the better to understand the enormity of the offence thus committed against Him, call to mind the points of the preceding meditation; that is, that, in the first place, you offended, not any sovereign of earth or angel of heaven, but a Lord of incomprehensible greatness and goodness, the first Beginning and last End of the whole universe, Whom, as He is all Being, and that infinite, all Perfection, and that infinite, all Loveliness, and that infinite, we are bound to devote all our esteem, all our reverence, respect, and love as to their rightful object; and even if we could conceive the greatest esteem, reverence, respect, and love of Him that can be conceived by the utmost strength of our understanding and our will, we should not succeed in appreciating, reverencing, and loving Him except in a measure infinitely short of what He deserves. Consider, secondly, that you, who have offended Him, are entirely the work of His hands, and so deeply indebted to Him by thousands of singular favours bestowed by His more than Fatherly charity, and though you should altogether be consumed in His service you would not have paid the thousandth part of what you owe Him. Consider, again, that you are a poor creature of a most miserable nature, and, in comparison of Him, more contemptible and like nothing more than a grain of sand compared to the whole universe, so that you ought to stand before Him with such humility and trembling reverence as scarcely to have the power to breathe while considering how infinitely He is above you, far less to presume to offend Him: and lastly, consider that you were made and received your being, life, reason, and free-will for no other end than to serve and love Him, the one object infinitely lovely, the Supreme Good, in loving Whom

consists your final beatitude. Thirdly, consider that you have offended Him with intolerable audacity, in His presence and before His very eyes, with enormous forgetfulness and ingratitude, at the very time that He was maintaining your existence, and by the abuse of the very gifts He so generously bestowed upon you; lastly, with the most insulting contempt, inasmuch as you sinned for motives utterly worthless and contemptible.

IV. Conclude, from these considerations, that since the malice of any mortal sin is, on so many accounts, infinite, you ought, even though you should not have committed more than one in your whole life, to abase yourself for that one sin in the deepest abyss of humility, not to venture to appear in the presence of men, but to be ashamed of yourself, and to esteem yourself unworthy of any good—unworthy of the earth bearing you, of breathing the air, of being shone upon by the sun, and still more of being conversed with and treated courteously and as a fellow-creature by any man; seeing that, on account of your great and surpassing wickedness, they ought all rather to avoid you, drive you from among them, and regard you with hatred and disgust, as a sink of uncleanness, a putrid carcass, a monster of perfidy, a disgrace to rational creatures, a traitor, a plague, a demon: for such most certainly is every one who has, though but once, rebelled against God, and been guilty of outraging His Majesty; much more one who, it may be like yourself, has done so as often as the opportunity occurred. Endeavour, therefore, to conceive very keenly these sentiments of the most just humility, and to express them with due confusion before God; acknowledging that you have deserved to be in the clutches and trampled by the feet of the devils, and consequently, that as no possible sufferings you may endure from men can be compared

with those which are endured by the damned in hell, so they must always come short of what is due to you for your sins. Hence it is that you have no good reason left, either for impatience in sickness or any other adverse occurrence; or for anger and complaint as though you were receiving an injury, even if everybody who met you should load you with a thousand insults and spurn you with their feet; but that in the midst of these, and all other possible affronts that you may meet with, you ought to esteem yourself far more kindly treated than any one deserves who has been, like you, the enemy and insulter of God. "I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved." [8]

V. Lastly, break forth into the strongest possible act of contrition: believing most firmly that though you should conceive a sorrow sufficiently vehement to oppress and break your heart and cause you to fall dead as you knelt, it would still not be as powerful as one single grievous offence against God deserves. Therefore, you ought not to be satisfied with any expression of grief, but again and again, with renewed efforts of loving sorrow, to bewail and detest above every other evil your crime in having offended a God so infinitely gracious, to be covered with confusion, to beg pardon for it, and to drive it from you so sternly, resolutely, and perpetually, that you may feel it impossible ever again to commit it.

[8] Job xxxiii. 27.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the Parable of the Prodigal Son,[1] *in which is shown to us how man departs from God by sin and returns to Him by penitence.*

SUMMARY.

I. How this young man left his father from an irregular desire of living as he pleased: and how this, too, is the reason why the sinner forsakes God, turning his back, for the sake of an insane and unbridled liberty, on so good a Father.

II. That, as this young man, in flying from subjection to his father, became the slave of a foreign master, and instead of living at ease in his father's house, was driven by want to keep swine and to feed upon husks, so the sinner, refusing subjection to God, becomes the slave of the devil, and whereas before his sin his sentiments and affections were conformable to his rational nature, he is afterwards hardly to be distinguished from an irrational animal, having no care but to satisfy his unclean appetites, and living only for their brutal gratification.

III. That, as the young man returned to himself and to his father, comparing the wretchedness of his condition away from him with the happiness he enjoyed when with him, so also would every sinner do if he would but consider how much more peaceful and happy he was when in a state of grace, than now, when he is out of the favour of God.

IV. The father's kindness in receiving his repentant son, and the far greater goodness of God in receiving the contrite sinner, and that not once only, but as often as, after having again and again forsaken Him, he returns to Him by penitence.

V. That this young man never again desired or thought of leaving his father; and that if that former master of his had come to invite him to be his servant again, he would have driven him away with anger and detestation; and that in this same manner every one should act who has returned from sin to the grace of God, rejecting with detestation, as unworthy of being heard—far less accepted—all invitations of the devil to return to his base and miserable slavery.

[1] St. Luke xv.

I. Consider what was the reason why this young man left his father's house, in which there was no want of comfort, and good treatment, and plenty. The reason was an inordinate love of liberty. He was tired of living by rule; he began to regard dependence on his father as a slavish and intolerable yoke; in short, he resolved to live in future without any restraint of law and just as he pleased. And is not this the reason by which you were urged to forsake your Heavenly Father by sinning? What was wanting to you with Him? What trouble had He ever caused you? What just satisfaction had He refused you? Was He so austere as never to allow any pleasure or recreation to His children? On the contrary, He was so kind that He permitted them to enjoy whatever reasonable and innocent amusements they chose, only forbidding those which were unworthy of their noble birth, low, disgraceful, and brutal. And every one sees that nothing can be more prudent, tender, or necessary than for every wise father to make such a prohibition, which should be cheerfully accepted by every good son; and yet you were so offended by it, and had such a horror of it, that merely through hatred of it you turned your back on a Father in Whom there was nothing else you could dislike, but on the contrary, everything that ought to have been most delightful to you. What an utterly irrational resolution!—which, had you only had a spark of sense in your mind, ought never to have occurred to you, even in a dream. And so, for the sake of a foolish, fancied, and pernicious liberty, you shook off the obedience and filial subordination to that God Who, by a purely free election, had adopted as a son you, who were by nature His slave, and treating you as a son, had brought you up from your birth in the Holy Catholic Church, that is, in His own house, promising you, if only you did not go away from Him,

the everlasting inheritance of his heavenly Kingdom. Detest this conduct of yours, so unwise and ungrateful, and acknowledge that by it you have made yourself utterly unworthy ever to be again received as a son by your great Father. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee. I am no more worthy to be called Thy son."

II. Consider, what came of this young man's leaving his father. When he found himself in possession of his inheritance, free to spend it as he pleased: "Ah, now," he said, "I shall have a pleasant time, leading a gay life, and gratifying all my appetites, with nobody to take me to task about it." But things turned out quite differently. For very soon he had squandered all his capital, and was driven by want to take service with so negligent a master, that he made him his swineherd, without giving him any victuals, so that "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him."

This, then, was the perfect liberty, the happy life, which he had looked for when he left his father. Impatient of enduring his paternal guidance, he had degraded himself to a state of base slavery under a foreign master, and instead of being waited on by servants as before, and supplied abundantly with everything he wanted, he was reduced to keep a herd of swine, and to lack even their disgusting food. And this is the case with every sinner. From a blind desire of liberty he has thrown off subjection to God—a noble subjection, in which the very angels glory. And is he, then, free? On the contrary, he has made himself the slave of a most cruel tyrant and his own greatest enemy, namely, the devil. Yes, he is the slave of the devil: that is the state of every one who is in sin. And how does the devil treat these voluntary slaves of his? Just as the master he chose treated the Prodigal. He

sets them to feed swine, that is to say, their brutal appetites; so that the soul, which, before it sinned was animated with a noble and rational spirit, is now scarcely to be distinguished from an unclean animal, steeped in the mire of low, abominable, disgraceful pleasures, which, moreover, can never satisfy him. "They that were brought up in scarlet have embraced the dung."[2] O miserable change, which was long since foretold by God to the sinner in these words of Deuteronomy: "Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joy and gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, thou shalt serve thy enemy, whom the Lord will send upon thee, in hunger and thirst and nakedness, and in want of all things."[3]

III. Consider how this poor young man returned to himself and to his father. He did so by setting himself wisely to reflect, first on the misery he was enduring when away from him, next on the far different lot which he had enjoyed when with him. "How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger. I will arise, and will go to my father." And oh! how surely would this same result of returning within themselves and to their Heavenly Father take place in all sinners, if they, too, did but reflect what they were before they forsook Him, and what they are now that they have turned their back upon Him, saying in their hearts: "Oh, how much better and happier a life I led when I was in the grace of God than now, when I am in sin! What quiet, what peace of conscience I enjoyed! With what a calm and peaceful mind I lay down at night to sleep, and how much sweeter were the joys of prosperity, how much less bitter the pains of adversity, because of a good conscience! Now, on the contrary, the tumult of my unregulated passions, the reproaches of con-

[2] Lament. iv. 5. [3] Deut. xxviii. 47, 48.

science, the terrors of Divine Justice, prevent my having one quiet hour. I know not whither to turn my eyes without beholding objects which fill me with sadness and fear. If I lift them up I see the heaven that I have lost; if I cast them down, I see hell, where my eternal abode is prepared. If I look around me, all creatures seem to reproach me with my unfaithfulness to their Maker and mine. If I contemplate myself, I am forced to blush for the foulness of my life. When the bell tolls for the dead, I am overwhelmed with sadness at the thought of my near and inevitable passage into eternity. When it thunders, I turn pale and tremble for fear of being struck dead by lightning. If I am sensible of any great change in my state of body, my mind is still more disturbed by the apprehension of apoplexy or some such sudden death. Neither do I find any satisfaction in those pleasures of the senses which were the chief cause of my forsaking God, for they are embittered by the internal conflict of the soul, and rather increase than appease the hunger of those who indulge them. And besides, I do not possess them in sufficient measure to satisfy the hunger of the sensitive appetite, and even if it were so I could not gratify it to the full without falling into very great contempt with men, and exposing my health to grievous diseases, or my life to violent death. So that, continually tortured by an insane desire of a food which could never satisfy me even if consumed in the largest quantity, and which I am able to enjoy in a very limited degree, I am perishing hourly by a tormenting and shameful hunger: 'I perish with hunger.'" Happy indeed would they be if they would thus contrast the misery they are enduring at a distance from God with the happiness they enjoyed in His house, and in obedience to Him! I am very sure that they would not an instant returning to Him Whom they have left at

such cost to themselves. "I will arise, and will go to my father."

IV. Consider how the father received this son, when he repented and returned to him. He might have shut the door in his face, and sent him away with the same indifference with which his son had left him. But it was not so; on the contrary, he ran to meet him, he embraced him, he reinstated him in the place of a son, he had him washed from his uncleanness, clad like himself, and caused a solemn banquet to be prepared, to refresh and do him honour. Who can fail to see here the kindness which God is wont to show the sinner who returns to Him by the way of penance? He prevents him with the necessary help, cleanses him from his interior defilement, gives him the kiss of peace, clothes Him with His grace, receives him again as His son, and prepares for him a banquet of spiritual consolations—oh, how far sweeter than the husks of the swine which he fed upon before!

And it is further to be remarked that we only read of the father of the Prodigal once bestowing on him these marks of paternal kindness. Who can say whether, if he had again forsaken him, he would have been received with the same affection at his second return? and if he had repeated his offence four, five, or six times, we may feel sure that, disgusted with so much ingratitude, he would have troubled himself about him no more, but would have said, "What do you mean by carrying on this game of going away and coming back? This is the sixth time that you have done it, and I will not have you any more in the house." I believe he would have spoken in that way. But not so does God, our most loving Father, deal with us. We have shamefully forsaken Him, five, ten, a hundred, a thousand times, and oftener still, yet every time has He taken us back to His paternal embrace. What

goodness! such as never has been or can be witnessed, and which, as it shows us the reverence, obedience, and love that so tender a Father merits from us, so also ought it to make us detest the more our past stubbornness in forsaking Him.

V. Consider the conduct of this young man after returning to his father's house. Did he ever wish to leave it again? Oh, no: too deeply was the wretched issue of his former departure impressed on his mind. Suppose that old master of his had come and said to him, "My good youth, will you return to my service? I will set you again to feed those swine—you shall again eat their husks:" what would have been his answer? He would have sent him away with contumely, with words of hatred and detestation: "What! do you think that one of gentle birth, as I am, will go and be your servant? I was once driven by want to do so, and would that I had never done what I blush for, and shall blush for as long as I live. But now that I am in my father's house, provided with everything, well served, and magnificently treated, should I not be utterly crazed to accept so vile an offer? Away with you, and your swine and husks, and seek elsewhere for some one to tend the one and feed on the other."

Such, too, ought to be your disposition of mind after returning, by the way of penance, to your Heavenly Father. You ought to be so resolved to live henceforth always with Him, that the thought of abandoning Him should not so much as cross your mind; and if the devil, to whom you once made yourself a slave, should invite you again to enter his service, promising you in return the swinish gratifications with which he then regaled you, reject his detestable proposals with disgust, as not worthy even of being listened to, far less accepted; say to him, "Depart, Satan! What is

it that you presume to ask of me?—that I should degrade myself from my present rank of a child of God to become your slave? Inconceivable was my madness in ever having done so, and I have too much to repent of for my whole life to think of again committing what I can never sufficiently detest. What do I want with your sordid husks, who am fed by God at His own Table with the bread of Angels? Depart from me, and seek elsewhere for one as mad as I once was, but as, by God's grace, I am no longer."

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the conversion of St. Mary Magdalene,[1] *which is the model for that of every sinner.*

SUMMARY.

I. That the conversion of this holy penitent was prompt and without delay, following immediately on the first light and touch of God.

II. It was also generous, overcoming all obstacles, especially those caused by human respect.

III. It was, besides, thorough and complete, causing her to employ for the service of God all those things which before she had made use of to offend Him.

IV. She did this, too, from the very best motive, namely, from a pure and perfect love of God.

V. It was, lastly, solid, constant, and enduring till death.

I. Consider the promptitude of this sinner's conversion—"As soon as she knew." No sooner was she enlightened by a ray of Divine grace to know her spiritual maladies, than she had recourse without an instant's delay to Him Who had the power to heal her: she did not wait for a more suitable opportunity, but hastened to a great feast, which certainly would not seem a very convenient place for confession and remission of sins, there to seek her Heavenly Physician, to throw herself at His Feet, and to beg Him to heal and save her. That is the true and certain way of forsaking sin; to correspond with the movements of grace without allowing the fervour of new resolutions time to cool. All delay in the path of salvation is most dangerous, first, because God is not bound to wait for one who is slow to follow Him, and next, because there is nothing

[1] St. Luke vii.

more natural to human weakness than to pass from a feeble desire of doing right to not desiring it at all—from putting it off to abandoning it altogether. It requires a great spring and energy of will to break the bonds of inveterate vice: and how is this spring and energy compatible with delay, slackness, and sloth? Besides which, a person who goes on waiting and considering about more suitable opportunities of forsaking sin shows plainly that he has not learnt aright in what a miserable condition he is. If it were so, he would ardently desire to be delivered therefrom, and the greatest haste would seem all too slow for such an end. In short, there is no clearer sign of not desiring anything strongly than to desire it for some future time, and the devil's most successful stratagem for hindering the conversion of sinners is to appear to approve their intention as good and necessary, and to oppose, not the determination to put it into execution some time or other, but only the doing so at once and immediately, which, in fact, is only a covert way of altogether preventing it.

II. Consider that, together with this promptitude of conversion, this holy penitent displayed generosity and fortitude of soul in overcoming the obstacles which were in the way of her conversion, that is worldly reputation and the opinions and remarks of men: for she went to the banquet-house where our Saviour was, alone, in careless and unstudied dress, through the streets in which she was accustomed to appear so splendidly attired, without ever noticing the wonderings and whisperings either of those who met her and who could not tell the reason of this novel proceeding, or of the Pharisee, and the disciples who were the invited guests, when they saw her come in hurriedly, throw herself at the Feet of our Redeemer, and mar the merriment of the feast by her tears. In like manner does he act who has a keen, true, and just idea of his sins. His whole

life is so absorbed in sorrow for having committed them, and desire to obtain God's pardon, that he is incapable of considering what men are thinking or saying about him. And you may be very sure that if you think much about such things, and make them of importance, and, for fear of being laughed at by your acquaintances, either give up being converted, or defer it, or do it less perfectly than you ought, you have not yet understood aright how miserable and terrible a thing it is to be out of the favour of God, and in danger of everlasting perdition. For, if you saw that as you ought, you would be in such haste to escape as quickly as possible from so great an evil that you would go headlong to encounter the most serious risk, much more to overcome so trivial an obstacle as the chatter of a few foolish persons. Strive, to the uttermost, to increase this knowledge in yourself; and if, for the sake of satisfying your sinful appetites, you have hitherto been unmindful of the true and merited disgrace which you must bring upon yourself from all wise men, see now how unreasonable it would be, when it is a question of attending to the concerns of your eternal salvation, not to dare to do so for fear of the idle mockery of the foolish and the wicked, thus being courageous only in disregarding the contempt of others when it is deserved, and cowardly in dreading it when you ought to care nothing about it, because it is unjust and unreasonable.

III. Consider that, besides being prompt and generous, the conversion of Magdalene was thorough and complete, since she used for the service of God everything which she had before made a means of sinning and offending Him; she disfigured by weeping the eyes which had once been so licentious and unguarded: she wiped the Feet of her Redeemer with the hair which she used to adorn so carefully to entangle the souls of others, and she expended in His honour those sweet

essences with which, from excess of luxury and delicacy, she was wont to anoint herself. From all which you, too, may gain, an example of the method you ought to follow for a perfect and thorough conversion: that is to say, that you should study especially to please God in those things in which you have principally offended Him; thus the more you have sinned from love of any particular vice, the more must you exercise yourself in practising the contrary virtue. So let past gluttony be atoned for by strictness of temperance; faults of avarice by abundant alms; pride and revenge by tokens of meek endurance and sweetness; too great freedom in conversation by more severe reticence, and so in all other ways. "As you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity, unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification."[2]

V. Consider another merit in the conversion of Magdalene, that it proceedeth from the love of God, and that not in any stinted measure, but intense and vehement. Wherefore, the largeness of the forgiveness granted to her corresponded with the greatness of her love—"Many sins are forgiven her because she loved much." You have imitated this penitent in the multitude of her sins, but have you done so in the energy of her love? It may be that you were driven to detest and forsake your sins merely from fear of punishment. And although it cannot be denied that by this means you have received remission of them in the Sacrament of Penance, yet oh, how much more would you be secured against relapsing into them, how much more would you be strengthened, nay, how would you go on continually growing in the grace of God, if you did but abhor them with perfect contrition, that is from the motive of theological charity? All the more,

[2] Romans vi. 19.

because as this charity is able to cancel sin of itself, and without the sacrament, so in certain cases of sudden death, it may be the one absolutely necessary condition of everlasting salvation. Strive, therefore, to know its value, to esteem it very highly, and to make frequent acts of charity both in and out of confession, so that, by means of the habit thus acquired, they may be the easier to you when the necessity for them arises.

V. Consider lastly, that the conversion of this fervent penitent was solid, constant, and enduring till death. She never again returned to her past sins, nor ever relaxed in the hatred she had once conceived against them: nor, although Christ had granted her a plenary forgiveness of them, did she grant it to herself, but continued to weep for them as long as she lived, with constant and rigorous penitence, and to make satisfaction for them to the Divine Goodness once so grievously offended, now so much loved by her. And such is the conduct of one who turns to God with perfect contrition. For, as his sorrow for the sins he has committed is not precisely with the object of obtaining their pardon, but because he has thereby offended the Lord Whom he loves above all things, so, this motive continuing perfect in him after their remission, his sorrow for having committed them continues perfect also. And the greater his assurance that his offended Lord has graciously forgiven him, the greater too is both his love for the Divine Goodness and his sorrow for having ever offended. Endeavour to imitate so excellent a model of perfect conversion. And all the more ought you to do this, because you have not heard from the lips of Christ as she did, the words: "Thy sins are forgiven thee—go in peace," so as to have, as she had, an entire certainty that your past transgressions have really been forgiven, and that consequently the continuance of your sorrow could not

have the effect of giving you further assurance on that point. And even though you were absolutely certain that they are forgiven you as regards their guilt, you are still uncertain about their entire remission as to their penalty. So that you see plainly how important it is to go on making amends for them more and more by continual penitence.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

On Venial Sin.

SUMMARY.

I. Venial sin, being an offence against God, is more grievous and more deserving of abhorrence than any other evil whatsoever that can be endured by creatures, even than the destruction of the whole universe.

II. It is a spiritual sickness of the soul, and produces in it the same effects as diseases produce in the body, rendering it feeble in good works, depriving it of the taste and savour of spiritual things, causing it uneasiness and trouble, and preparing for that which alone is the death of the soul, namely, mortal sin. Therefore, as in order to avoid bodily sickness, we abstain from many pleasant things, and make use of many that are repugnant to the senses, much more ought we to do this in order to avoid venial sins, which are maladies so much the greater, as the soul which they affect, is nobler than the body.

III. It is punished in Purgatory by very severe pains, which are greater than all those of this life. Whence we infer that that cannot be a small evil which is punished so severely by God, the most just and merciful Judge.

I. Consider that although venial sin is not a grievous offence against God, inasmuch as it is not a transgression of laws involving the penalty of the loss of His favour by him who disobeys them, nor yet the preferring of any created good to the one supreme good, namely, His grace and friendship, it is, nevertheless, a certain offence against Him, inasmuch as it is the breaking of some law of His, as, for instance, the prohibition of lying, giving way to anger, vain talking. For it is evident that whosoever disobeys his prince or his father commits a fault and an offence against him.

What follows from this? It follows that venial sin is a more grievous evil than any that can be endured by creatures, and that it ought to be regarded by every one with greater horror, not only than his own death, but that of the whole human race, and the destruction not only of a nation or a kingdom, but of the whole universe. So that if Rome were threatened by an earthquake sufficiently serious to swallow it up, and not leave a single living soul in it, and if it were in my power to save it from that imminent destruction by some little superstitious act which could not be considered more than a venial sin, I ought to choose to be crushed and buried beneath the ruins with all the rest of the inhabitants, rather than offend God even so little as that. And if, to put an impossible case, the heavens and the earth, and all men and angels were about to be annihilated, I might not, in order to save them, tell the slightest falsehood, but rather suffer every one to be destroyed, beginning with my father and mother and nearest relations. For it is a thing most evident that all men and angels are, in comparison with the infinite Being of God, no more than a grain of sand, and that, consequently, the destruction of this little grain cannot be equal to the smallest offence against that immense Being. Surely, if a fly were to annoy you by flying and buzzing about you, you would have no hesitation in killing it, to get rid of that little annoyance, and your reason would be that it is an insect of little or no importance in comparison of man, so that ever so little an inconvenience to the latter may well be got rid of at the cost of the greatest evil to the former. Well, then, you must know and believe most certainly that you and all creatures are much less in comparison with God than a fly is in comparison of you. Wherefore if, because of its unimportance as compared with yourself, you regard its entire destruc-

tion as a lesser evil, and therefore preferable to your being ever so little annoyed by it, you ought, on account of the infinite littleness of yourself and all creatures in comparison of God, to esteem your own destruction and theirs a far less evil, and therefore far preferable to offending and displeasing Him in the very smallest degree. See, then, what is the importance of those faults which we call trifling, and which we so easily commit daily for any mean motive, such as to avoid some unpleasantness to ourselves, or not to offend some one else! They are so important, that each one of them surpasses in gravity the destruction of the whole of creation. The offence is, indeed slight, but it is an offence against God, and this is enough to cause it to be regarded by one who has a right conception of that infinite Being with greater horror than that with which he would witness the utter destruction and instant return to its original nothingness of this vast machine of the universe with all the creatures it contains, the heavens, the stars, the elements, and men and angels.

II. Consider that venial sin, besides being an offence against God, is a spiritual sickness of the soul, and occasions in it those bad consequences which material diseases produce in the body. And what are these? They deprive it of the strength requisite for its operations, they take away the appetite and relish for food, they cause uneasiness and disturbance, and they incline it to death. Precisely similar are the effects which are the consequences of venial sins in the soul, especially when they are deliberately committed, with full advertence, and with an habitual affection to them. In the first place, the soul becomes weak and languid, it loses its former energy in doing well, in restraining its passions, and in advancing in the spiritual life; it also finds very great great difficulty in the most ordinary virtuous actions, so that it either neglects them

entirely, or performs them in a perfunctory manner, and when assailed by any temptation of the devil, it resists it very feebly, and with much difficulty. And why? Because it is sick, it has lost its strength.

Secondly, there ensues a great disinclination and dislike of spiritual things: it finds no relish in the thought of God, it feels a disgust for pious discourse, the reading of spiritual books becomes wearisome, and prayer as distasteful and difficult as chewing tow, so that a yawn comes every now and then, and the one thought is to get to the end. All these are the consequence of a vitiated palate, which is unable to relish good food. But perhaps, as the desires are gratified in sinning, the soul will, at all events, be at rest, and free from that disturbance which is the result of bodily sickness. On the contrary, these very desires, the more violent and immoderate, the less they are mortified, are the paroxysms which disturb it by their agitation, rob it of all repose, and render it troublesome to itself, showing us by experience the truth of those words of St. Augustine: "Thou, O Lord, hast decreed and so it is, that every soul which is in disorder shall be its own punishment."

Lastly, it cannot be doubted that as the liberty of committing venial sin lessens in the soul the love and holy fear of God and those habits of virtue which are its protection against mortal sin, so, by increasing on the other hand those bad qualities which lead to it, such as the evil habit of yielding to the passions, of acting against reason, and of preferring our own taste to that of God, it continually inclines us to grievous sin. So true is this that it would be little short of a miracle if any one who went on committing venial sin easily and unrestrainedly, were to keep clear for any length of time of mortal sin. This being the case, reason and prudent care of ourselves require that as

we not only protect ourselves from bodily death, but also from bodily disease, and with this object, avoid many things which we should naturally like, and choose many which, on the contrary, we are naturally averse from ; so also we should beware, not only of the death of the soul, which is mortal sin, but also of its diseases, which are venial sins, and be ready, when this is necessary for avoiding them, both to abstain from things which are the most pleasing, and to submit to those which are the most unwelcome to the senses. And let not any one here think of saying that his inclination to satisfy this movement of gluttony, his repugnance to endure that injury without resenting it, is too strong for him. It is only sufficient answer to say: "Yes, it may be so ; but you would like in a fever to eat fruit and to drink iced water, and yet you abstain from doing so, for fear of aggravating your sickness; and I suppose you have a great dislike to being bled, to taking strong purgatives and other medicines, which, nevertheless, you make use of as tending to cure you. If, then, you make no difficulty of overcoming any natural inclination or repugnance for the health of your body, which is the earthly and animal part of your nature, what a shame it is to shrink from doing the same when it is a question of the health of your soul, a part of you so much more noble, that it is, so to say, the whole of your being! It is much the same thing as if you were to refuse to spend for the health of your child what you spend willingly for the health of your cattle.

III. Consider that after death venial sin is punished in the fire of purgatory with very severe sufferings; and if there were no other argument on the matter, this should of itself be sufficient both to teach you how great is its malice, and to make you determined to avoid it with all possible diligence. And first, to show

its malice: What, I ask, would you think if you saw a father throw his son into the fire? Certainly one of two things: either that the son had committed some act of extraordinary wickedness, or that the father was a barbarian, devoid of all humanity, and more savage than a tiger, thus to punish his child for some childish fault. Now let us turn to our own case. Is it not most certain that the souls of those who die in the grace of God, as the souls in purgatory did, are God's children, yet He keeps them suffering there for days, weeks, and months. You will agree that this is so. What, then, is the consequence to be inferred? One of these two: either that those souls are guilty of some great fault, or, if they have committed light ones, that God is cruel and unjust to punish them so terribly for offences of no importance. But to attribute cruelty and injustice to God would be to contradict the first principles, not only of faith, but of natural reason. We must, therefore, conclude that those souls have committed some great evil, and since they are only venial sins of which they are there paying the penalty, how great, how very great an evil must that be which is so severely punished by a God of supreme justice and clemency. But, you will say, they are called light offences. Yes, certainly in comparison with mortal sin, which is the greatest of evils. Otherwise, and speaking absolutely, they are so far from being rightly called a small and light evil, that they surpass in gravity all evils simply penal, and that if their malice were duly appreciated, it would cause us greater horror than hell itself. And not only should you learn from the punishment decreed after death to venial sin, how hateful, execrable, and malignant it is in its nature, but also how firmly you ought to determine never again for anything in the world to commit it. Let us suppose this case: that when any one has told a lie or

been guilty in a slight degree of detraction, the Church had imposed as an unavoidable penance the fasting for months on bread and water, or making a pilgrimage barefoot for several days. Would you, under these circumstances, dare to be guilty of falsehood or detraction with full advertence? I am sure you would not, for your reason would suggest that it would be great folly to subject yourself to so severe a penance for an idle gratification of the tongue. How, then, can you so boldly commit these and similar faults, knowing that by them you incur a punishment so much more intolerable as that of being tormented for days and weeks in flames? Oh, let it be so no longer; but examine yourself a little, to see what are the venial sins into which you habitually fall, and resolve never again to commit them deliberately, and with full advertence.

FOURTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On death, considered as to its nature, that is, as it is the passage of the soul from time to eternity.

SUMMARY.

I. Death is the departure of the soul from the body, and from this material world for another country where it is to remain for ever: therefore it ought to be much more concerned with that, its eternal destination, than with this short and earthly sojourn.

II. As the soul, when at the time of death it quits the body and this world, must leave for ever all the temporal goods which it possessed, it ought, therefore, to make very little account of them.

III. It will not be able to carry anything with it into the next world, except its works; how great, therefore, should be its solicitude in providing itself with a supply of good works.

I. Consider what death is. It is nothing else than a passage from time to eternity; that is, it is the departure of the soul from the body, and from this visible world in which it is now dwelling, in order to go to another and an unknown world where it has to remain for ever, *in domum æternitatis suæ:* and consequently, when it is said, 'It is appointed unto men once to die,'[1] it is simply saying that we all of us have two dwellings, and two lives, the one transitory, which is the present, the other perpetual, which is the future life; and that we must all, one day, quit the former, never to return to

[1] Heb. ix. 27.

it, and enter the latter, never to leave it. Consequently, there are two things with regard to this subject which you should set before your mind and meditate with serious attention. First, that you will not live for ever, nor even for a very long time in this world, breathing this air, walking through these streets, dwelling in these houses, occupied with these affairs; but that a certain day has been fixed by Divine Providence, a day which is always drawing nearer, and which may be at a very short distance indeed, when your life will have come to to its final termination, and when with it will also end your gains, if you are a merchant; your studies, if you are a professor of science; the ruling of your subjects, if you are a prince; your amusements, if you are a man of pleasure; in short, there will be an end of every earthly thing which has belonged to you in this world, and which was supposed to make you happy. The second thing is, that that very day and moment in which your life here shall end, you will have to begin another, and one so much more important and valuable, that it is the only one which can be truly called life; because, whether the condition of man in it is happy or miserable, it is a condition either of pure and entire happiness, or of pure and entire misery; and further, in regard of its infinite duration, which will never have an end for all eternity. Endeavour, I say, to apprehend these two all-important and most certain truths, with the utmost possible clearness, and then see how great would be your folly, if, not being able to live more than a few years in this world, and having to live for endless ages in the next, you should take greater pains in providing for this short life than for that unending one: nay, that you should be so exclusively occupied with the cares and interests of this world, as to leave scarcely a thought or feeling for the next. What would you say of a traveller on his way to Rome, where he

intended spending his whole life, who had new inns built in every place he passed through on his journey, or else had the old ones gilded, painted, and inlaid with marble, and in this way spent the whole of his capital, so that, on reaching Rome, he had not a farthing left to live on? Would you not be amazed at him, and consider him quite mad? "What!" you would say, "you are only going to spend four or five nights at these inns, and you are intending to settle at Rome for all your life; and yet you forget the latter and only think of decorating the former? Is it possible, that for the sake of being magnificently lodged for the few days of your journey, you are indifferent to the prospect of being houseless and starving at its end?" And yet, is not this precisely the conduct of the man who, knowing that he is merely passing through this world, in which he is only living as in an inn which he will be leaving to-morrow, and that in the next an eternal and indefectible life awaits him, nevertheless spends the whole capital of his diligence, care, and industry in providing himself with a convenient and splendid dwelling-place here: that is to say, in building palaces, planting vineyards, heaping up riches, procuring dignities, and leaving behind him a great reputation, without giving a thought to the country beyond, which is the "house of his eternity;" going to it utterly unprovided, without considering whether he will there find a good or a bad lodging, whether he will there lead a happy or a miserable life? Oh, brethren! understand once for all, that "we have not here a lasting city."[2] No, no: you will not always be in this world; you are only passing through it, "as pilgrims and strangers." Very shortly, whether you will or no, you must leave it. Your home is an abiding, an eternal one; it is not here, but it will be such as you have prepared it while

[2] Heb. xiii. 14.

here. Do you believe this? You answer that you do. Why, then, take more trouble about the inn than about the dwelling? Why think more of living well in a place you must so soon leave than in one where you will live for ever? What can you reply?

II. Consider that there would be some reason for striving after, valuing, and being attached to the goods acquired and possessed here, if it were possible for the soul to carry them with it out of this world. But such an expectation is an idle thing: for let a man have been ever so rich and possessed of ever so great an abundance of temporal goods, "when he shall die he shall take nothing away, nor shall his glory descend with him."[8] He must leave the world naked as he entered it, and abandon all the things which he acquired with so much labour, and valued so highly. There is no help for it, no possible escape or exception for any one: every living soul, of every rank and condition, must infallibly submit to be thus deprived and stripped of everything. It will befall the rich: and where then will be their money and lands, their stores of gold and silver and splendid clothing? It will befall the learned, and what, then, will be the end of all those erudite compositions, those much vaunted books of theirs? It will befall princes, and of what avail then will be their purple, their tiaras, their crowns, and sceptres? Not one of all these possessions will they carry with them into the other world. They are theirs no longer, the time for enjoying them is past, and the time appointed for giving them up has come. Whether they will or no they must strip themselves of them and bid them a last farewell. Now they take delight in possessing them, but as great will be the anguish with which they will then see them snatched from their grasp. Now they deem themselves very

[8] Psalm xlviii. 18.

happy in being abundantly supplied with these things, and they are proud and puffed up on that account; but at the moment of abandoning them they will see that they were only like the trappings of the stage, and what folly it was to toil as they did for their acquisition, to make much of them, and to put their trust, happiness, and glory in them. In a word: "They have slept their sleep, and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands."[4] No, nothing; not so much as a rag of all their stores, a rusty farthing of all their wealth. Then will those sad words out of Wisdom be in their mouths: "What hath pride profited us, or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All these things are passed away like a shadow."[5] We have a striking instance of this in Alexander the Great: who was ever more successful and glorious, more powerful and richer than he? We need only see how he is described in the Scriptures, in the First Book of Machabees, chap. 1: "Now it came to pass after that Alexander, the son of Philip the Macedonian, had overthrown Darius, king of the Persians and Medes: he fought many battles, and took the strongholds of all, and slew the kings of the earth, and he went through even to the ends of the earth, and took the spoils of many nations, and the earth was quiet before him." Such was his career of war and prowess and victory, that since,—great personage that he was, he was after all a mortal,—we see him, after having extended his dominion over so great a part of the world, condemned by nature to leave it, like all the rest of the children of Adam: "And after these things he fell down upon his bed and knew that he should die." And having come to this pass, what did he do? Let us once more listen to the Sacred Scriptures: "And he called his servants, the nobles

[4] Psalm lxxv. 6. [5] Wisdom v. 8, 9.

. . . and he divided his kingdom among them." He divided it! And was it all, then, for them? Did he keep back nothing for himself—nothing to take with him into the other world—was there nothing set aside for himself? Nothing; this famous hero, this unconquered leader, this successful conqueror, this mighty monarch, passed into eternity without so much as one soldier to attend upon him, naked, destitute, penniless, and alone as any beggar could be. Spend some little time in considering this point in detail; then, having sufficiently meditated on it in the general, make an application of it to yourself, going over, one by one, those good things which you either possess or hope to gain in this world, and reminding yourself that you will not be able to keep one of them after the moment of death—a moment, it may be, much nearer than you think—but that, as soon as that time comes, you will have to restore them all to their real owner, as so much property merely lent to you for a short period. Hence follows the need for divesting yourself of all affection for them, and regarding them, while you are still in good health, with the eyes of a dying man, that is to say, with the same perception of their worthlessness with which you will regard them by the light of the candle blessed for your hour of death. Ah, yes, it is then that men judge rightly of things; then, when the dimness of the senses, the mists of concupiscence, and the cloud of popular opinion have vanished from the sight, and all transitory things, so soon to be left behind, are seen in the light of the coming eternity to be no more than a flash of lightning, a shadow, or a dream. "O death, thy sentence is wholesome."[6] But it will avail little to be undeceived in that last moment. Now, now is the time for despising what will then seem to be despicable, for not loving what

[6] Ecclus. xli. 3.

will then be the torment of those who have loved it, and not seeking what it will then be of no use to have gained.

III. Consider that as it is certain that the soul will have to quit all that it possessed on earth, so it is as infallibly certain that it must carry with it into eternity all that it has done here—"for their works follow them."[7] Here, then, is something that will not end with the ending of life; here is that which we must endeavour to obtain in life; holy and virtuous actions, pleasing to God, and which merit the glory of heaven. These are man's real possessions, the only treasures which he will take with him into the next life, these are the goods, the fruits of which will be a delight through all eternity. How is it, then, that men are, on the one hand, so eager in the search after dignities, riches, and other such like worldly goods, which they know most certainly that they must shortly leave; and, on the other hand, so careless of doing good works, which alone will be their portion in eternity? Is not this much greater folly than that of a man who, knowing that he would shortly be banished from his country and sent into a foreign land, would only think of providing himself with money which does not pass there and with things which are strictly prohibited from admission? Do not you be so foolish; but as that man, if he had a grain of sense, would hasten to change the money of his native country for that which is current in the place to which he has to go, so do you, who must needs pass from this temporal to an eternal life, and who know that the only goods which are of any value there, the only goods which can be taken there, are virtuous actions, apply yourself, while God gives you time, in laying up as much of this capital as possible, keeping only just so much of

[7] Apoc. xiv. 13.

earthly property as suffices for the support of your brief existence here, and changing all the rest for that money and those rewards which will avail you in your eternal life in the other world. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting."[8]

[8] St. John vi. 27.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Death, in regard of its essential characteristics.

SUMMARY.

I. This passage of ours from time to eternity must be made shortly; how contemptible, therefore, does this nearness of death render all the good and evil of the present life.

II. It is the most important of all the actions that can be done by man, since on our performing it well or ill depends our eternal happiness or misery; how anxious we should therefore be to do it well.

III. The day and hour appointed for it in the case of each person is uncertain. We ought, therefore, to be every day and hour in the dispositions and state of preparation requisite for doing it well.

I. Consider that death must shortly overtake you: "Remember that death is not slow."[1] How long have you to live on earth? Grant that it is to be for a long space, seventy, eighty, or a few more years: "the days of our years are threescore and ten years, but if in the strong they be fourscore years, and what is more of them is labour and sorrow."[2] Cast your eyes a century back. How many millions of men were living at its commencement in the four quarters of the world, and among them how many persons of importance—nobles of the first rank, gay and spirited young men, captains famous in war, men of letters, distinguished by their talent and learning, princes remarkable for the extent of their dominions. And how many of this great multitude are left? Not one. But what has

[1] Ecclus. xiv. 12. [2] Psalm lxxxix. 10.

become of them? Whither are they gone? They are gone where death takes all men: their bodies to turn to dust underground, their souls to eternity. And when another century has run its course, how many will be left of all the other millions who have taken their places and now fill the earth? Again, not one. Before that time has passed all of them, after a long or short appearance in the changing scenes of life, are destined to quit it, leaving their bodies decaying in the earth, and passing with their souls into eternity. This, then, is the very longest space of your earthly life—not more than a hundred years. And what are these few and small atoms of time in comparison of the eternity which awaits us afterwards? How quickly they pass, and, having passed, leave no trace behind them! Let us suppose the case that God lets you live a hundred years, and enjoy all that time the utmost prosperity, pleasure, amusement, riches, and honours that can possibly be enjoyed by man, always in good health and spirits, free from all trouble or annoyance, respected, liked, and favoured by every one. Such a life you think, doubtless, a very happy and desirable one. Well, grant it: but all the same, first one, then another, and another, of these happy years will pass away, and so on gradually, without your perceiving it, to the hundredth. And when that, too, has passed as swiftly as the rest, where will be the honours, the riches, the prosperity, the enjoyments of that happy century? What has become of them all? They have all vanished like smoke—they have gone like a beautiful dream. Nothing is left of them, time has carried them away; it is as if you had never enjoyed them, as if they had never been. Let us now suppose, on the other hand, that you have to live for a hundred years in the utmost misery, destitute of the most necessary support, afflicted with incurable diseases and continual sufferings of

the body, full of sadness and affliction of heart, abandoned, despised, disliked, a trouble and burden to yourself. "Oh, what a dreary life!" you will say, "or, to speak more truly, what a living death!" But take courage: for these hundred years, too, will pass away one by one, and according to the nature of all finite things, the very last will come in time. Then, where will be all those griefs and sickness and misery? You will feel no more of them than if you had never in your life experienced them for a moment.

So that all of us must shortly (at the latest after a hundred years) come to a moment, which is that of our death, when it will be the same thing whether we have lived in continual prosperity or in continual misery, seeing that both the one and the other will then be over for us, and so unable to cause us the slightest sensation either of pleasure or pain. The one important thing, then, is to arrange for our future life, in which those who are happy, are happy for ever, and those who are miserable, are miserable for ever, and it is this which merits all our consideration and care. And as to our life here, which passes away so rapidly, whether we are rich or poor, at our ease or in difficulty, well or ill, merry or sad, these are differences not worth making much of. It is all a question of a few days; it will all look the same very shortly, and be as if it had never been. Go over in your mind the twenty, thirty, or whatever may be the number of years that you have lived. You will find that many things happened in them which were very pleasant, and many which were very painful to you. What impression do they make upon you now? Do they seem to have lasted long? Do they not rather seem to have gone like the wind? "My days have gone faster than a post."[8] Do you give much thought to them? On the contrary, they

[8] Job ix. 25.

seem like things with which you have nothing to do. Reflect, then, that in like manner will it be with all things present and future, when, at the moment of death, they too, will be of the past; they will appear to you very brief—things of a day, and not worth thinking about, since they have nothing to do with the condition, either of happiness or misery in which you then are. Accustom yourself, therefore, to regard them, not as they appear to you now, in your lifetime, but as they will do when you are dying, and they and you are both drawing to an end; and whenever you feel any eager desire of these things, ask yourself that emphatic "And then?" of St. Philip Neri. You desire that preferment, that dignity. We will suppose that you obtain it, and enjoy it for fifty or sixty years. "And then?" Then death will rob you of it, it will all be over for you, and of no more profit to you than if it had never been yours. "If a man live many years, and have rejoiced in them all, he must remember the darksome time and the many days, which, when they shall come, the things passed shall be accused of vanity."[4]

II. Consider that this passage into the other life, which you have seen is so near to every one, is the most important action that you have ever done or ever can do in the whole course of your life, inasmuch as upon it depends your happiness or misery for all eternity, that is to say, your last end, and the chief of all your concerns. So that, according as your death is good or bad, in or out of the grace of God, so will your life be for ever either a most blessed one in heaven or a most miserable one in hell. You will then have to take a great leap from earth to Paradise, and the most serious thing about it is, that it has to be made over a tremendous abyss—that is, over hell. Happy will you be if you succeed in so making it that you safely reach

[4] Eccles. xi. 8.

the shore beyond, then you will be out of all fear and danger, there you will remain, enjoying God, and reigning for ever with Him. But if you should fail—if, instead of reaching that happy goal you should fall into the abyss beneath, woe!—woe, indeed!—woe for ever to you! No prayers can help you, there you will remain for all the ages of eternity, burning and suffering, despairing and lost, with the devils: "If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be."[5] And how long shall it "be there?" Throughout endless ages, for ever, as long as God is God "there shall it be." See, therefore, the importance of this leap, which will either land you in eternal and perfect blessedness, or plunge you in extreme and eternal misery. If, then, this is true, and if it is equally true that in a short time we must all inevitably take this tremendous step, does not right reason demand that we should think of it during our whole life, that we should keep it continually before us, that we should set ourselves with the greatest possible care and diligence to perform it well? And, as a man who is going to take a great leap does not wait till he is on the brink of the chasm to gather himself up for the requisite spring, but takes a run from a distance, in order to make a more vigorous one, so we, too, should not wait till our last sickness to prepare for that most tremendous leap of ours, but begin from this moment, by the most anxious and ceaseless preparation, to make our way towards it, to take our run, as it were, so as to make it better. And yet, how can we sufficiently censure and wonder at the great indifference of the majority of men in this matter? For they are so intent on their worldly aims and business, which, being all concerning temporal and transitory things, are nothing more than shadows and child's-play, that

[5] Eccles. xi. 3.

they give no thought to this most weighty matter, for which alone they were created, and on which depends nothing short of an eternity of torment or of bliss; or if it should by chance come into their minds they do all they can to get rid of it, and to banish it, as a dismal subject, from their thoughts. And they who, if they had on hand a suit for fifty thousand pounds, or any other worldly interest, would leave untried no means, no possible effort by which they might ensure success, yet in this one thing which concerns their greatest, because eternal interests, are content with the slightest and most prefunctory attention; many, indeed, give no heed whatsoever to it, and defer the preparation for it till they shall be warned of approaching death—that is to a time which, besides the uncertainty of their having such warning, they know to be of all times the least fit for attending to any business, and think the clumsy and disorderly preparation, which is all they can expect to make when on their death-bed, sufficient for the successful setting of the greatest business of all. This is a far greater imprudence than it would be in a criminal to put off preparing his defence till the very hour in which his cause was to be irrevocably decided, or in a soldier to defer procuring the arms necessary to fight with till he heard the signal given for battle. Compassionate this lamentable blindness of men, examine yourself to see whether you have not in some way failed in the solicitude required by an affair of so much importance, and determine on the means to be employed in future for bringing it to a happy conclusion, especially on that which is the surest of all, namely, a holy life. For, as the life of man will be for ever blessed or miserable, according as his death is good or bad, so, too, ordinarily, is his death good or bad according as his life has been holy or sinful.

III. Consider, that as it is certain that you will

before long have to make this passage from the present to the future life, and that according to the former will be the latter, so, on the other hand, it is uncertain at what precise time, under what circumstances, and in what way you will have to make it. For, although God keeps an exact account, not only of the years and days, but also of the hours and minutes which each person has left to live, and has appointed to every living soul, with all particulars, where, when, by what accident, in what manner he has to die, yet no individual can tell, in his own case, whether his death is to be natural or violent, whether it will give indications of its approach or whether it will be altogether sudden. Wherefore death is likened in several passages of the Sacred Scriptures to a thief in the night: "The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night."[6] And yet, whenever we imagine our own death, we put it at a great distance, in extreme old age, and always in our beds after some illness of several days, which will increase so gradually as to enable the doctors to give us warning, and ourselves to make the necessary preparation. But these are fond fancies, and hopes built on no secure foundation. For it may be that we shall die to-day or to-morrow, with no doctor to warn us, no time to attend to our soul; or we may be shot by a bullet, or smitten by apoplexy, or struck by lightning, or buried by an earthquake, or perish by any other of the sudden and violent deaths to which we are continually exposed, or of which we daily see fresh instances, now of one sort, now of another.

Seeing, then, that death may certainly overtake us at any hour and moment of any day, and that instantaneously and at a blow, without allowing us time to amend the state of our souls, but sending us into eternity, prepared or unprepared, in or out of the grace

[6] Thess. v. 2.

of God, just as it finds us; seeing this, I say, it is evident that if we have the slightest desire of ensuring that most important of all matters, our everlasting salvation, we ought not to pass a single moment of our life without the preparation which is absolutely requisite, and to be, in each one of them, in the dispositions we should wish to be in if that moment were, as it may be, our last, so that when death does come upon us it should find us in the state we should desire and need to be found in, that is, in the grace of God. And it is no less evident, on the other hand, that for a man to live, but for an instant, out of the grace of God, in the hope that death will not come then, but that there will be time to put himself in a better condition, is one of the greatest follies he can commit, one of the most mischievous stratagems employed by the devil for the destruction of souls, and one of the straightest and most crowded ways to hell. Such a hope is an accursed and a treacherous one, a hope which has led, and is still leading countless multitudes to everlasting perdition. "I shall not be carried off by death in my present state of sin," you say. Who has told you so? Whence do you gather this assurance? What certainty of it do you possess, physical or moral, human or Divine? Most assuredly you have none. It is, therefore, possible that you may be taken in this state, as has happened to very many who, having ventured to sin, or to go on sinning, on the same treacherous presumption, died suddenly, without having that time for repentance which they counted on, and who are now bewailing and will eternally bewail in hell their irreparable folly. And is it, think you, the part of a wise man to trust your eternal salvation to the strength of a "perchance," that is, to the contingency and mere possibility of an event so doubtful, and which has deceived so many? Lastly, this hope, on which you

rely, may fail you as it has failed others, and should this be so, what, alas! will then be your fate? In what an abyss of torments will you find yourself irreparably plunged, with what despairing words will you for ever curse your credulity in trusting to this treacherous siren!

Take therefore, this prudent advice of a heathen philosopher, "It is uncertain in what place death awaits you; do you, then, expect to find death in every place." And just as, supposing you knew that at some one hour of the night, though what precise hour it was you were ignorant, you would be attacked by thieves, you would not let any pass without finding you watching and ready to defend yourself; so, knowing, as you do with infallible certainty, that in some particular year and day and hour and moment of your life death will overtake you, reason requires that you should be watching for its arrival every year, day, hour, and moment, and prepared to meet it without injury to yourself. For as you do not know the precise moment appointed by God for its arrival, there is not one in which you can neglect the necessary preparation for it with any certainty that that is not the one when it will arrive, and, on the other hand, you are quite certain that if it finds you unprovided, that is, out of the grace of God, all hope of happiness is over for you for ever. In short, it is an all-important point in that chiefest of all things, the ensuring of your eternal salvation, that you should not risk remaining out of God's grace one moment of your life, on the supposition that before you die you will be sure to have time and leisure sufficient for putting yourself in a better state. "Be ready"—so our Saviour warns us—"for at what hour you think not the Son of Man will come;"[7] thus inferring, from the utter

[7] St. Luke xii. 40.

uncertainty of the future, that the preparation for eternity is not to be put off, but to be made now and continually. Listen, oh, listen to this salutary advice: consider that if, in consequence of your rashly presuming to follow the contrary course you, like so many, should be surprised by death in a state of sin, your lot will be fixed for ever, there will be no repairing your error, and your tears and cries and remorse will be of no avail in hell. "Oh, fool that I was! Why did I not prepare better for what was coming upon me? Why did I stake upon the uncertainty of a mere possibility the greatest of my concerns, the attainment of my last end, the salvation of my soul?" But in spite of this tardy repentence, you will have to suffer torments in hell for ever. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." [8]

[8] St. Matt. xiii. 9.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On certain things which precede death.

SUMMARY.

I. The dying person will be incapable of doing good works; how important is it therefore not to defer till that time the necessary preparation for our eternal salvation.

II. The things which will have power to comfort the dying person in his last agony will be, not any of the goods of this life, but the good works done in it; how careful, then, should we be to secure for ourselves so sweet and solid a comfort.

III. The things which will trouble the soul before death are these: (1) The sins it has committed; (2) the time it has wasted; (3) the uncertainty as to its lot in the next life. Therefore, every one ought to live in such a manner, that at that moment these three things may have no power to disturb him.

I. Consider the state of extreme weakness and inability to do good works, in which the dying person will be. For if a violent headache or toothache is wont so to depress the mind and occupy it with what is being endured, that it is hardly able to recite a *Pater*, what can be expected in the last agony when the whole body will be full of pain and trouble, the strength entirely prostrate, the head confused, the functions disturbed, the senses dulled and half lost? How much more overwhelmed, how much less able to make supernatural acts of heartfelt contrition, of lively faith, firm hope, and perfect charity will the mind be then? Whence also we may understand the error of those persons who, living completely immersed in the things of this world, and without any thought of the other, not only make sure that their death will be preceded

by an illness, during which they will be warned by the doctor in time to provide for their eternal salvation—not only, I say, do they give themselves this rash and fallacious promise, but they go on to suppose that, at a time of such suffering, and therefore so unsuited to the slightest application, as the time of our last sickness, they will find that easy which, even now that they are well and strong, they cannot bring themselves to, because of the great difficulty which they say they find in it; that is the arrangement of that involved account of conscience which has never been sufficiently examined and set straight; a thorough conversion to God, of which they have never had any but the most confused notion and feeble desire: a sincere, efficacious, and supernatural hatred of the sins which, by long and continued habit, have almost become part of their nature; the making acts of perfect contrition, which it is doubtful that they have made, or even that they know in what they necessarily consist, the satisfying for confessions, either bad, or the validity of which is doubtful, and lastly, the arrangement of everything for which they feel remorse of conscience, and which is required for the full satisfaction of debts contracted during fifty or sixty years of life. In addition to which, these difficulties, so considerable in themselves, are often aggravated by the false kindness of relations, who from fear of distressing the sufferer prematurely and without evident necessity, cannot be induced to warn him of his nearly approaching end till he is on the brink, and, so to speak, more dead than alive. And yet death when drawing near so overwhelms the senses of a man that it scarcely leaves him power to make the ordinary acts, which, either from their intrinsic easiness, or from the long habit of practising them, require only a moderate degree of attention.

The sinner, on the other hand, is so little accustomed

to make acts of perfect contrition, and his conscience is so bewildered with perplexities, that it would be difficult for him, even in a state of perfect health, either to make the former or to disentangle the latter, without great weariness of head and an extraordinary effort of mind. What then can be expected at that last moment, according to the ordinary course of things, but that he will make a mere material and formal confession, rather than one accompanied by real sorrow, and die, as he had lived, impenitent, notwithstanding that time for repenting and preparing for death, on which all his hopes rested, and in short, that despite the assistance of the priest, the recommendation of the soul, and all the sacraments of the Church, he will go straight to hell? After having considered all this, endeavour to gather from it the fruit of these three resolutions: first, not to defer to the time of your last sickness anything which you see to be necessary as a preparation for death and for ensuring your everlasting salvation, but to attend to it now when the vigour of both your mind and body will enable you to do it so much better; secondly, to accustom yourself to make frequent supernatural acts of faith and the love of God, and of sincere hatred of the offences you have committed against him, so that this habit may render it easier for you to renew them at your death, when it is both more necessary and more difficult to make them; and thirdly, to take care in every illness to be warned of the first sign of danger, so that you may prepare for that last and most important passage, with a mind as free and as little oppressed by your sickness as possible.

II. Consider what are the things which will console the dying man in his last agony. Will they be the good things of this world which he possessed and enjoyed in his lifetime: such as great riches, splendid dignities

and position, the government of nations, gay conversations, dances, festivities, banquets, and such like amusements? Ah, no—all these things are over for him. On the contrary, the greater the delight he had in their enjoyment, the greater will be his sadness at having to leave them in an instant, just as the stomach, loaded with indigested food, has to reject it with as much pain and difficulty as it received it with satisfaction. "His bread in his belly shall be turned into the gall of asps within him: the riches which he hath swallowed he shall vomit up."[1] "Woe is me," I seem to hear him sigh with his last breath, "this, then, is all the fruit of my toil and labour and industry! How hard I worked to gain this post—to accumulate that capital! And no sooner is it done than, instead of enjoying it, I am obliged to leave it. Cruel fate! inexorable necessity! 'Doth bitter death separate in this manner?'"[2] Much more will this anguish be increased, when, as so often happens, some offence against God has been committed either in seeking, or gaining, or spending such things; for then, in addition to their approaching loss, there is the burden of guilt which must be carried to the tribunal of God. What, then, are the things which will console him at that moment? Do you ask what they are? Those which are now the most unpleasant to him—fasting and prayer, the bearing of injuries, the mortification of the will. Yes, these will then be his only comfort and relief. They are, it is true, distasteful now; they are felt to be burdensome, bitter, troublesome, and unwelcome: but then they will be changed into sweetness and consolation. How will the soul rejoice in remembering them; how joyfully will it exclaim, "Blessed be God that I endured that injury, restrained that passion, did that penance; the labour is past, and the time is

[1] Job. xx. 14, 15. [2] 1 Kings xv. 32.

come for reaping the fruits which will be enjoyed for ever. 'I have laboured a little, and have found much rest to myself.'"[3] Imprint, therefore, on your mind a lively representation of that sudden change, which will then most surely take place in yourself as in all men; and whenever the occasion arises for refusing something agreeable to your natural appetite, or for bearing something repugnant to it, say to yourself, "Oh, how glad I shall be at the hour of death and through all eternity, that I mortified this inclination, that I overcame this repugnance." And thus animate yourself by the sure expectation of that happiness, to despise the brief trouble of present labour and difficulty.

III. Consider what are the things which will trouble he mind of the dying man, and increase the pains of his last agony. They will be these three; the sins he has committed, the time he has wasted, and the uncertainty of his eternal future state. In the first place, then, he will be troubled by the sins he has committed: "The sorrows of death surrounded me, and the torrents of iniquity troubled me."[4] Those sins, I say, so numerous and grievous, which now it hides from itself, regarding them in a flattering light as things if not virtuous, at least pleasant and profitable, but which then, severed from all their temporal pleasure and advantage, will be seen in their mere naked deformity, as horrible insults offered to God, actions opposed to all right reason, involving an infinite malice, and deserving of eternal death, lastly, as offences for which, as their forgiveness is uncertain, it most surely knows that it must render shortly a most exact account before the Divine Tribunal. The consequence will be that the soul will detest them more than any plague or prison, wonder how it could ever have given admission to monsters so horrible, and curse the hour in which it

[3] Ecclus. li. 35. [4] Psalm xvii. 5.

was seduced to commit them. The second torment will be the thought of the time wasted in vanity. "Alas! I have lived sixty years and more on this earth, and what years have they been? How barren of good works—how void of merit! How small a portion of them have I spent in the gaining of that eternity, which is the only end for which God granted them to me. They have been almost entirely spent in trifles and follies—in thoughts and actions which were sinful, or, at best, useless. So that it is well if I can reckon up a well-spent hour, or even half hour in a day. How many opportunities of doing virtuous actions have there been in all this time! And what a store of spiritual riches I might have laid up if I had profited by them! But I took no heed of them; I suffered them to pass uselessly, either not doing any good, or doing it for crooked and merely human ends, that is, to no profit. And now, after having lived, or to speak more correctly, lost sixty years, I have reached the moment after which 'time shall be no longer.'[5] Woe is me, throughout all eternity I shall not have a single instant in which to lay out to advantage the capital of my everlasting beatitude. And still greater woe, that, having had so many, I have been so careless in their use, that I find it miserably scant. Why was I so thoughtless? Why did I neglect so many means of enriching myself? Why did I not spend my time more profitably? If only God would raise me up from this sickness, I would act quite differently: I would lead the life of a saint. I would pass all my days in prayer, and in works of mercy and penance." Such will be the repentance of the soul in its last agony, but it will be too late, and avail only to increase its anguish and remorse.

And once more, the third cause of its intense tor-

[5] Apoc. x. 6.

ment will be the uncertainty of its future state in the next world. "I am now on the threshold of eternity, and what is to be my lot there? I cannot tell, I only know that it must be one of two things, heaven or hell, everlasting blessedness or everlasting misery; and in an hour or two this great point will be decided. In an hour or two will be pronounced the irrevocable sentence fixing my lot for ever in glory with the angels, or for ever in perdition with the devils. And if, O my God, the latter should befall me, how will it be? My whole soul shudders at the thought: and yet, it is not an impossibility. I have no assurance of the contrary. Very soon I shall know by experience." This uncertainty concerning two destinies so opposite does not make any great impression on us who regard it, as it were, from a distance. But to one who is very near, and on the point of receiving his sentence, as is the case with every dying person, it will be a strangely terrible thing, enough to paralyze him with terror; more especially as the devil, whose object in life is to make the conscienee very easy, does the very reverse at the hour of death, exaggerating the grievousness of the sinner's offences, the strictness of the Divine justice, and the difficulty of salvation. If, therefore, you have well considered all this, resolve so to live henceforth, that in the hour of death these three things may not have power to trouble you. For which purpose, you should in the first place, provide against the anguish which past sins then occasion, by taking care not to commit any, especially mortal sins; and not delaying an instant to cancel by acts of perfect contrition and other works of satisfaction, those which you have already committed. Secondly, be careful to employ the time which you have left in holy and meritorious actions, remembering that when once it is gone, it is gone for ever, and that a day will come when you will

vainly lament having foolishly wasted it, and when you will be unable to repurchase at any price the occasions of meriting which you now neglect. Thirdly, take care to lead as holy a life as possible, "that by good works you may make sure your calling and election."[6] For, although not even the saints can have an absolute certainty of salvation, yet he who has tried in his lifetime to avoid offending God even in the least thing, and to do in all things what he sees to be His will, and most pleasing to Him, as he has great tokens of dying in His grace, so with great peace and confidence he goes to His tribunal. It is thus that the saints sweetened the bitterness of death—and thus, too, may you do so. Every one will say, "Let my soul die the death of the just."[7] But in order to render this wish efficacious, let it live the life of the just. And if any one would escape a fruitless repentance in the next world, let him do and leave undone now what he would fain have done and left undone in his last moments.

[6] 2 St. Peter i. 10. [7] Num. xxiii. 10.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

On certain things which follow Death

SUMMARY.

I. The entire and perpetual forgetfulness of the deceased by his friends and acquaintances; how little account, therefore, ought he to make during his lifetime of their regard and affection.

II. The humiliation and hideousness which follow death, both when first the soul leaves the body and after burial, and how this consideration should have power to make us lay aside both our extravagant care of our own bodies, and our vain admiration of the strength and beauty of those of others.

III. The soul, immediately on quitting the body, will have all its ideas as to the good and evil of this life, changed and set right; we ought, therefore, in order to form a just opinion of them now, to endeavour to esteem them as lightly as we shall then do.

I. Consider that as soon as the deceased has quitted this life the affection hitherto borne by his relations, friends, and acquaintances is lessened, and before long entirely ceases. No sooner has he breathed his last than they cannot endure to look upon him, but get him out of the house as quickly as possible, in order to remove so melancholy an object from their sight. While the bells are tolling, and the funeral going on, they speak of him a little, and shed a few tears for him, but when the body is buried, and the last *Requiescat in pace* has been said, they resume their occupations and amusements, and in a few days he is forgotten, and no more thought of than if he had never been in the world, or they had never known him. The dead are dead; let those who are alive live while they can. The affection which they formerly bore him, was founded

either on the hope of some advantage, or on the delight they took in his presence, and in intercourse with him, now that it is no longer thus excited and kept up, it gradually cools and dies out. Is not this true? Do we not see it happen every day? Do not you know it by your own experience with regard to so many deceased persons whom, in their lifetime, you loved, honoured, and held in great esteem, and of whom you now never think, or if ever you remember them, it is only in a casual and passing way? And you may be certain that it will be the same with your relations and friends in whom you confide so much, and who now seem to love you so greatly, and say that they could not live without you: they are fair words, but it is all mere seeming. Hardly will you have passed from their eyes than you will also have vanished from their heart and remembrance. They will go on with their conversations and diversions, their banquets and amusements, and spend their lives as merrily as ever without your company—nay, without so much as a thought of you. The very persons out of regard for whom you have, it may be, often broken God's laws, will be the first to leave off remembering you, thinking of you, and caring for you. And are such friends worth making much account of? Is an affection so superficial, so frail, so faithless and unenduring, deserving of so much value, that either for the sake of returning or of preserving it you do not mind failing in your duty to God, offending Him, and giving up His friendship? Oh, no; He is the only constant Friend Whose love will never fail those who are faithful to Him, and Who is so far from forgetting His servants after death, that it is at this very time that He admits them to the most intimate communications of Himself and His glory.

II. Consider the state of humility and hideousness to which the body is reduced on the departure of

the soul at death. Before sickness it was active and spirited, strong, comely, and blooming; now, on the contrary, it is pale and mute, cold, bloodless, and stiff, without sense or emotion, or use, a mournful sight to all who look upon it. Gradually it begins to decay and corrupt, and it is speedily put underground that it may not infect the air. There it lies in a close, dark vault, forsaken by all, the miserable food of worms, blackening, decaying, and falling away in corruption, till at length nothing remains but bare bones and a handful of dust. This is the end of all bodies, and this will, before many years are over, be the end of yours: that body which you now display in the streets with so much bravery and state, magnificently dressed, sweetly perfumed, attended by servants, receiving bows and greetings from one and another; that body which is now lauded for its beauty, strength, and activity, which you cherish and pamper, to which you can refuse no fancy, and for which you procure every sort of ease and comfort and luxury. Soon, very soon, there will be an end of all this state and splendour and indulgence, and the end will be hideousness and degradation, disgust, decay, and corruption. Bring before your mind what it will be on the bier, and, after that, in the tomb—how wretched and vile and revolting and contemptible, and then ask yourself whether it is reasonable to take so much care of such a mass of corruption, and actually to esteem and love it more than your soul, that incomparably nobler part of you, by so often risking its eternal salvation for the sake of a base and momentary gratification of the body, thus preferring the latter to God Himself, and being regardless, so long as it is indulged, of offending Him, the sovereign Creator and Lord of the universe, of losing His grace and provoking His anger, so that He may well reproach you as He did that king of old, in these words: "Thou

hast cast Me behind thy back."[1] Then when you have seen how contemptible your body is, because of this humiliation and vileness, to which it will soon be brought by death, go on, for your further instruction, to contemplate the same sad and terrible change in the bodies of two other persons, who were most admired in the world in the days of their health and strength. The first shall be some woman, fair as Helen of old, some wonder of all but superhuman beauty, who charmed and fascinated all beholders by the brilliancy of her complexion, the grace and symmetry of her form, the brightness of her eyes, the elegance of her movements, and the sweetness of her manners. What do you think of her? You admire her, you are captivated by her, you are never tired of gazing on her. But remember that, after all, this beautiful body is mortal, and before long will be, like all others, a corpse. Look at it then: alas, what a change from one extreme to another! Who could recognize it as the same? Where is that glow of colour? How suddenly it has vanished! How it has all changed to squalor and ugliness! Nothing is left of those eyes, once so bright, but two blank and shapeless hollows. Those cheeks, once so blooming, are the abode and food of worms; that sweet smiling mouth breathes stench and corruption. Where are you? All you who esteemed it a kind of bliss even to approach her, come and draw near, and take your fill of the sight that you so delighted in. How is this? They knit their brows, cover their nostrils, distort their faces, and leave the place as quickly as possible; it is more horrible and revolting to them than any sink or dunghill. O death! death! how great a teacher of truths thou art! How dost thou tear off the mask from all human misery! How dost

[1] 3 Kings xiv. 9.

thou strip the covering from the vileness and weakness of our earthly state! Learn, then, from this spectacle to despise the frail and fleeting beauty of the body, and not to dwell foolishly on its outward surface, but to look deeper, and perceive the horrible and revolting corruption which lurks beneath that treacherous covering, and which will shortly be disclosed by death. Lastly, in order to correct in like manner all false ideas of worldly power, go and contemplate, stretched on his bier, one of the mightiest and haughtiest sovereigns who have ever reigned on earth, one who was, in consequence, feared and reverenced by all as an earthly god, so that the proudest of men sought his favour, feared his anger as much as death, dreaded giving him the shadow of offence, and only ventured to address him or to appear in his presence with the most profound respect and the most trembling awe. There he lies, a dead, pale, silent, motionless corpse. Is he still as he once was, the arbiter of human destinies, the terror of the world? Can anything, on the contrary, be more abject, more contemptible, more powerless to do good or ill? Is there a beggar, a slave, or any one, the lowest imaginable, who fears, or reverences, or cares about him? With how little respect do his servants touch him when preparing him for the grave! boldly do the meanest of his vassals stand before him, and look at him in his coffin! How noisily do the undertakers close and nail him down! All his power of helping or harming is gone in a moment, and with it all the fear and respect which he inspired. We are taught wonderful lessons by the dead. Well will it be for you if you impress them so deeply on your mind as to regulate your love and regard for your own body and those of others by the consideration of that wretched and abject condition to which, by an indispensable law of nature, they must soon be reduced,

and never to behold them, as they appear in this short scene of life, without remembering, at the same time, what they will be, how stripped of all dignity, in the grave till the last day.

III. Consider the change which will take place in the soul at the moment of its departure from the body, as to its ideas of the good and evil of this life, how it will regard them thenceforth with an indifference as great as was formerly its opinion of their importance. Oh, then, in that dawning of the true light of eternity, how little will all those earthly grandeurs look which now dazzle with their false lustre, how will they gradually dwindle to nothing! What child's play will that business, those aims, those plans appear, the issue of which is now a source of so much anxiety! What a mockery will that success or that failure appear, which now have the power of causing, the former such pride and vain delight, the latter such dejection and trouble! How will the soul wonder at itself and its blindness in having so highly valued and cherished trifles so worthless! Such most surely, and so widely different from what they are now, will be your opinions, and it is also certain that then, being no longer obscured by the darkness of sense and passion, they cannot but be right and just and true. If, then, this cannot be doubted, why do you not now endeavour to hold things at that just value, at which you will then most surely hold them? Why, since it is in your power to correct your judgments now when to do so will profit you, do you defer it till a time when it will be of no avail? Accustom yourself, therefore, to regard everything present, not according to the vain semblance of the senses, or the treacherous illusion of passion, or the false maxims of the world, but according to the infallible rule of that true judgment which you know that you will form after death. So that whenever you are agi-

tated by a violent movement of anger at some injury done to you, as you think, against all justice, or anxious and disturbed as to what will be the issue of some plan, or overpowered by sadness at some untoward event, or upset by any similar emotion from earthly circumstances, you may at once ask yourself: "How shall I feel about this after my death, when all things will appear in their true and proper dress? Will they seem to me so important as to be made much of by a man of sense? On the contrary, I shall think of them as insignificant trifles, which only a child in years or intellect could be concerned with: I shall wonder at my former delusion. I shall say, What little things troubled me! for what a mere nothing I was disturbed! Since, then, I am certain that I shall then think thus, and that what I then think will be right, why do I not think in the same way now?" Strive, I say, to make yourself familiar with this sort of soliloquy on all occasions, and to regulate your ideas accordingly. This will be, in reality, to be dead to the world, that is, to consider all things belonging to it, not as they appear through a dense cloud to those living in it, but as they will be seen to be in a true light, by one who is already dead, and who beholds them from the eternity into which he has already passed.

FIFTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Particular Judgment.

SUMMARY.

I. The Judge: that is, the God Whom we have so often offended, Who has no respect to the earthly dignity of any one, and Whose Judgment is most strict, according to the present state of him who stands before Him. All which are motives for fearing such a Judge, and for obtaining His favour.

II. The accused: that is, the soul, which will be alone, and without any one accompanying it to defend it and take its part; whence is seen the folly of those who, for the sake of friends and relations, who cannot then help them, are not afraid to offend their Supreme and Omnipotent Judge.

III. The matter to be judged: that is, all, even the least of our thoughts, words, and actions. This should make us very careful how we think, speak, and act now, remembering that we shall then have to render a most exact account of all this.

IV. The sentences to be given: namely, of three kinds, the first that of eternal glory for the saints, the second of eternal death for sinners, the third of imprisonment in Purgatory for the just who have lived carelessly; how much, therefore, we ought to exert ourselves, so as to merit the first, rather than the two others.

I. Consider Who it is Who is to be your Judge after death. It is God, a Judge Whom, in the first place, you have grievously offended by many mortal sins, and Whom you continue to offend daily by still more numerous venial sins; this should be a strong motive for deterring you from offending Him in future, since it is evidently madness to excite against yourself the anger of Him Who is to be the Arbiter of all your destiny.

Wherefore, whoever knows that he is to be judged in an important matter by a particular person, always treats him with the greatest respect, and seeks, as far as possible, to acquire his good will and to keep friends with him. Secondly, He is a Judge, Who makes no distinction whatever between the great and the inferior rank of those who appear before Him; as has been experienced by Alexander the Great, Assuerus, Julius Cæsar, and other such-like great personages, who, while they lived in the world, were reverenced as something almost more than mortal, either for their extensive dominion, military prowess, or some such gift. But He had no respect to such men, nor to the prerogatives of nature or fortune which they possessed, but, whenever He found them guilty of mortal sin, cast them from Him into hell, just as He would have done had they been labourers, beggars, or slaves. Seeing, then, that these earthly advantages are of no value in the sight of your Almighty Judge, do not put your trust in them, but strive rather to acquire those which you know to be esteemed and approved by Him. Thirdly, and lastly, He is an inexorable Judge, giving most strict sentence in the case of each person, not according to what his past state has been, but according to his merits at that present time: so that, supposing a person had led a life of the most severe penance and the most exalted contemplation for more than sixty years, and yet had committed one mortal sin before death, and passed into the next world without being absolved from it, He would condemn that man to hell for that one mortal sin, without any regard to the holiness of those sixty years, being a Judge Who at that time acts with strict and rigid justice, according to the universal laws of His tribunal, and the present state of the soul; so that He would reply to any one who should presume to complain, "My son, you have only yourself to blame.

The law, delivered for all, and well known by you, is that every one found guilty after death of grievous sin must be infalliby condemned to hell. Knowing this, you have not feared to appear, thus guilty, before My tribunal. There is, therefore, no remedy nor escape, but you must certainly go to hell."

Whence it is to be gathered that no one should make sure of eternal salvation because he has for many years been serving God in the constant practice of most excellent virtues. All that is well—but take good heed to yourself not to add to these good works any grievous sin, so as to appear with it uncancelled before death at God's tribunal. For, in such a case, all the good you have done before will not prevent that single sin from meriting for you sentence of death. "If the just man turn himself away from his justice and do iniquity . . . all his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered; in the prevarication by which he hath prevaricated, and in his sin which he hath committed, in them he shall die."[1]

II. Consider who will be accused. It will be your soul, alone, without relation, friend, or patron to defend and intercede for you. And yet how frequently, to please some relation, friend, or personage of importance, do you offend God, not considering that at that time of your trial not one of them all will have any power to help you, but that your eternal salvation or perdition will be decided by God alone, Whom, for the sake of pleasing them, you have made your enemy. Alas! for you. Whither can you then turn for help? To God? But He, with bitter reproaches, will send you to those for whose sake you have offended Him, saying to you, as He did to the people of Israel, "Where are your gods in whom you trusted? . . . Let them arise and help you, and protect you in your

[1] Ezechiel xviii. 24.

distress."[2] Why do you turn to Me, of Whom you used to take so little heed in your lifetime? Go rather to your friends and protectors, whose favour you preferred to Mine; let them help you in your present need." And then you will turn to them, imploring them not to forsake you in the peril which you have incurred for their sakes. But they will mock you with cruel jeers, answering you as the ancients of the synagogue answered the wretched Judas, when, driven by remorse of conscience, he sought help from them: "What is that to us? Look thou to it."[3] "What business is it of ours? You have got yourself into this danger, you must get out of it as best you can." Or, if they have some feeling of humanity leading them to pity your distress, they will excuse themselves saying, "My brother, so long as you were living in the world it was in our power to do you some service, but what can we do now that you are in this other world, where we are helpless?" And again, God will say, "See ye that I alone Am, and there is no other God besides Me. I will kill and I will make to live; I will strike, and I will heal; and there is none that can deliver out of My hands."[4] Oh, then, what exceeding folly it is in sinners to prefer the friendship of those who will forsake them in the time of their greatest need, to that of Him Who alone has power to save them; to be more anxious about what is said about them by men whose words and opinion are empty breath, than about the sentence of the Sovereign Judge, which is of infinite importance, because it carries with it an eternity of good or of evil! Do you learn to be wiser and never allow yourself to be led by a vain fear of becoming the object of the blame or gossip of three or four insignificant persons, to merit the terrible condemnation of God; nor, by a foolish desire of

[2] Deut. xxxii. 37, 38. [3] St. Matt. xxvii. 4. [4] Deut. xxxii. 39.

gratifying a friend, whose friendship is a very small thing in this life, and can be of no help whatever to you in the next, to draw upon yourself the anger of Him Who "can destroy both soul and body in hell;"[5] but when anybody, be he who he may, would persuade you to sin, reply boldly, "Sir, I value your favour, as it is right I should, but I value that of God more. And if, to please you, I should not scruple to do this, which is displeasing to Him, I shall have to answer for it at the day of my last judgment, which must soon come, and when you will not be able to take my part or to defend me; but the issue, whether happy or miserable, of that cause, so all-impertant to me, will depend solely on the will and sentence of God. It ought not, then, to surprise you, that I am ready to serve you when you do not come into competition with God, but that when I cannot do so without offending Him Who is the Master and Friend to Whom I owe more than to any other, and Who is able to do me more good or harm than any other, I prefer Him to you, His pleasure to yours." "If it be just in the sight of God to hear you rather than God, judge ye."[6]

III. Consider what will be the matter of this judgment. It will be the whole of your life, from the first use of reason to your last breath; that is to say, all your moral actions, both exterior and interior, not one of which but will be weighed and examined. And how vast a subject is this! How many words pass your lips in one single day between morning and evening! How many more thoughts pass through your mind—how many actions of the will, or of the sensitive faculties, are you continually performing! And yet with how little consideration do you now think about whatever comes into your mind, say everything which rises from your thoughts to your lips, look at

[5] St. Matt. x. 28. [6] Acts iv. 19.

everything which meets your eyes, do and desire everything to which your natural appetite inclines! But those words and thoughts and looks and desires are not carried away by the wind. All of them, even the slightest and most momentary, are most accurately recorded in the books of Divine Justice, all will then be ranged in order, and an account will be required of them all, and of each one in particular: "Give an account of thy stewardship."[7] "Why didst thou say such and such words? Why didst thou indulge such and such thoughts? Why didst thou look at such and such objects? Why didst thou do such and such actions?" Alas! how confounded will you be by these numberless and various questions! What difficulty will you find in having to answer them all, and to answer so as to satisfy your Judge! And more than this—you will have to give an account not only of everything that you have done in your life, but also of everything that you have omitted to do; not only of all your idle and vicious actions, but of all the Masses, Communions, prayers, penances, alms, and similar works, which, holy in themselves, you have done, either for a crooked end, or badly, or without sufficient reverence and devotion. So that as, if you were about to undergo an examination in philosophy, theology, or any other study, you would not pass your time without thinking of it, but would make as long and diligent a preparation as possible, considering beforehand all the difficulties which might be proposed, and the answers which would be best adapted for their solution; so, or rather with far greater care and diligence, ought you, according to right reason, to prepare for that most strict and important examination which will so soon be held by God, not concerning scholastic questions, but concerning your whole life; nor yet with a view

[7] St. Luke xvi. 2.

to a vain title of Bachelor or Master, but for the purpose of deciding whether you have merited eternal blessedness or eternal misery ; and for this end, consider constantly within yourself those words of Job : " What shall I do when God shall rise to judge ? and when He shall examine, what shall I answer Him ? "[8] Yes—" What shall I answer when He examines how I have traded with the talents of nature and of grace which He bestowed on me ? What shall I answer when He examines how I have kept my vows, my rule ? what fruit I have gathered from so many prayers and Communions ? how have I behaved in so many and various circumstances ? " But since to foresee, all and singly, the particular questions you will have to answer, would be an infinite and consequently an impossible thing, endeavour to reduce the requisite preparation to two heads, the one of which shall have for its matter your past and the other your future life, resolving, with regard to the former, what penance is due for full remission of all your sins up to the present time, so that no single item may remain in your conscience which you have not set thoroughly straight before appearing in the presence of your Supreme Judge ; and with regard to the latter, determining on the closest watchfulness and attention to all your conduct, so as not to venture on doing or saying anything unless you will be able to give a sufficient reason for having done so at your final examination : " I feared all my works, knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender."[9]

IV. Consider what will be the sentence which will be passed at that judgment. There will be three kinds, according to the number of the different classes of those who will receive them, namely—a sentence of everlasting happiness for the saints, of everlasting

[8] Job xxxi. 14. [9] Job ix. 28.

misery for the wicked and of temporal punishment for souls that are neither quite holy nor quite sinful. Then reflect on the different dispositions with which each of these three sorts of persons will stand before the Divine tribunal: first, there is the holy man who never in his whole life had any object but to love and serve his Heavenly Master, not only avoiding to the utmost offending Him even in the smallest thing, but always doing what he saw to be His will and most pleasing to Him. How will such a man feel and look as he stands there? Oh, with how serene a countenance, with how glad and confiding a spirit, as one who, having always borne himself towards God as an obedient child, sees himself regarded by Him rather with the tenderness of a Father than with the severity of a Judge, and who has nothing to expect but to receive from Him that most sweet and blessed sentence, the mere hearing of which is enough to make the joy of Paradise: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things I will place thee over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,"[10] Then look upon the second, that is, upon one of those licentious and unbridled sinners, who, without a sentiment of faith, without fear of God or a thought of the next life, live like brutes, abandon themselves to every vice, and give the rein to all their bad passions. How will he feel? Alas! paralyzed by fear, overpowered by utter despair, suffocated by mortal agony and anguish, like one seized and thrown on the ground by a fierce enemy, who sees his dagger drawn and at his throat, thirsting for his blood, and ready to plunge it into it and give him his death-blow; so, or rather with far more terror, seeing he has fallen into the hands of God,

[10] St. Matt. xxv. 23.

Whom he has continually insulted throughout his whole life, Whom he has now no hope left of appeasing, and Whose just wrath he can no longer escape, will he in terror and anguish, as of hell, expect every moment to hear the terrible and irrevocable sentence of his eternal damnation burst from the lips of His Judge, and crush him like a tremendous thunderbolt: "Depart from Me, thou cursed into everlasting fire."[11] Lastly, turn your eyes upon the third, namely, upon that tepid religious, or negligent Christian, who approaches the Divine tribunal without having incurred eternal death, yet laden with a heavy burden of innumerable venial sins. There he will stand—not, indeed, with the terror of an impenitent sinner, yet covered with intolerable shame and confusion, as a slothful servant summoned before his master to give an account of the property and business committed to him, which his conscience accuses him of having turned out badly in consequences of carelessness and mismanagement. He knows, too, that the anger of his Eternal Judge will not be satisfied with mere reproofs, but will go further, to the punishment of a most painful imprisonment in purgatory till he has paid the whole penalty due to his sins, and that he shall hear from Him that severe sentence: "Amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing."[12] After having considered all this, you have to decide which of these three different dispositions and sentences will probably be yours at that Judgment, concluding that it will be according as your life here on earth has been holy, sinful, or imperfect, and resolving so to live henceforth that you may not there appear either with the terror of the sinner or with the confusion of the careless servant of God, but with the peace and joy and confidence of His saints.

[11] St. Matt. xxv. 41. [12] St. Matt. v. 25.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the General Judgment.

SUMMARY.

I. The resurrection of the bodies of men: the extreme difference between the elect and the reprobate, both as to the properties of the body, which in the former will be most beautiful, and in the latter hideous, and also as to the joy with which the souls of the one, and the rage with which those of the others will re-enter their bodies; how much truer wisdom is it, therefore, to mortify the irregular desires of the body with the former than to indulge them with the latter.

II. The separation of the elect from the reprobate, and the envy with which the latter will behold the former so glorious and themselves so degraded. Whence, the just may be encouraged to bear willingly the lowliness of his present condition, and not to envy the prosperity of sinners, since the latter will then be turned into the greatest confusion, and the former into as great glory.

III. The opening of the books, and the public examination of every one's life, to the indescribable shame of the reprobate, both at seeing their most secret iniquities thus revealed in the sight of the world, and at hearing Christ, their Judge, reproach them, after the trial, with His benefits and their ingratitude.

IV. The two different sentences: the one most joyful to the elect, the other most terrible to the damned; and the different affections thence resulting in both.

V. The execution of the sentences, and the immutability with which each will, to all eternity, continue in the state and place then assigned to him.

I. Consider how, when the day comes for the last judgment, which at the end of the world will be held on the whole human race, according to the particular judgment which has already been privately passed on every one at the close of this life:

Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum
Coget omnes ante Thronum.

Mors stupebit, et natura,
Cum resurget creatura
Judicanti responsura.

Then when the angel has sounded the last trumpet, and the great summons has been made throughout the world: "Arise, ye dead, and come to be judged," the tombs will immediately be reopened, and the bodies of men—revivified by the power of God, and reunited to their souls—shall issue from them. But, oh, with what a difference! Those of the elect, endowed with glorious properties, impassible, beautiful, and brighter than the sun; those of the reprobate, on the contrary, horrible to behold, black as cinders, and, like red-hot iron, all enveloped in fire. Then, again, what a difference in their affections! with what gladness will the holy soul again take up its abode in the body, rejoicing together with it, that because they endured together the brief sufferings of God's service, they shall now enjoy together the everlasting reward of His glory. With what rage and fury, on the other hand, will the soul of the damned re-enter its body, cursing it as the cause of its perdition! "Oh, accursed body, and accursed hour in which I was united to thee, and still more accursed that in which I yielded to thy irregular desires! Oh, mad and miserable that I was, to ruin myself for the sake of obeying thee, and indulging thee beyond measure; now we shall both, in eternal torments, pay the penalty of those short joys which would that I had never granted thee." This, then, is the end of the inordinate love of sinners for their bodies: an eternal and furious hatred of them. Ah! fools and blind! was it not better to restrain and mortify the body here with the saints, and then, like them, to rejoin

it glorified, and to enjoy everlasting blessedness with it in heaven, than, for the sake of satisfying its evil appetites, to be damned together with it, and to blaspheme detest, and curse it for all eternity in hell? Make the application in your own case, and assure yourself that the more you love the body, the more severe will you be to it here.

II. Consider the separation that will be made between the elect and the reprobate, the former being all gathered together at the right hand of Christ with the angels, the latter at His left with the devils. And how will the hearts of the wicked be gnawed by envy at the sight of those just ones, whom in their life-time they despised as foolish and insignificant persons, whom they often ill-treated, tormented, and oppressed, some of whom, too were their servants and vassals, now exalted to so great a glory, princes of Paradise, companions of the angels, children of God; whilst they themselves, who were once so courted and respected in the world for their titles, offices, or riches, are now brought so low, the scorn of the universe, and swept away, like some vile rabble and the very scum of humanity, into that dark corner with the devils! Oh, how will they, bewildered at so sudden a change, revile their former judgments as wrong and blind and insane: "saying within themselves, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, These are they whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour: behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints."[1] Ah, where then will be the pride and pomp, the insolence and haughtiness which now mark their gait, their looks and speech, and all their movements? There they will stand, in that pillory, so to speak, at the

[1] Wisdom v. 3—5.

left hand, with downcast heads, humiliated, full of confusion, and vile, not only in the eyes of the rest of the world, but also in their own. Why, then, look only at the present time, in which we see the wicked triumphant, full of pride, puffed up, and haughty, as though the whole world belonged to them; and, on the other hand, the servants of God lying in a corner, abandoned, despised, and contemned "as the offscouring of the world;" of whom no one thinks except to mock and deride? This is a spectacle which will last but a few years; very soon it will be entirely reversed. A day is coming which will set right all this disorder, which will for ever assign to every one the lot which is his due, which will raise to the highest degree of glory the virtue which is now in the dust, and will bury in the lowest depths of ignominy the vice which now reigns triumphant; which will, in short, verify that declaration of God: "Whosoever shall glorify Me him will I glorify, but they that despise Me shall be despised."[2]

Keep, therefore, that day constantly before you, with the catastrophes and revolutions which it will bring with it. And thus remembering it, instead of suffering unwillingly, you will prize very highly your present mean estate, and instead of regarding the brief triumph of the wicked with envy, you will see that it is deserving only of compassion.

III. Consider the public and general trial which will be held in the case of each individual.

Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur
Unde mundus judicetur.

Judex ergo cum sedebit,
Quidquid latet apparebit.

Yes, when that great book is opened there will be

[2] 1 Kings ii. 30.

revealed in an instant, clearly and legibly before the whole assembled universe, not only all actions and words, but all thoughts, even the most secret—yours and mine and all men's. And, oh, what confusion will this cause the reprobate! For then will be seen in the light of day and before the eyes of the whole world, without any penitential satisfaction to lessen their deformity, those iniquities which they concealed so carefully, which they had not the courage to declare, even in a whisper and under the seal of inviolable secrecy, to their confessors, the mere knowledge of which and the inability of hiding them from themselves covered them with shame—those acts of hypocrisy, of sacrilege, those crooked intentions, those cunning plots and deceptions, those disgraceful sensual abominations, those base betrayals, either actually perpetrated by hand or planned in the heart. Think one moment how your face would burn with confusion, and how your heart would be agonized if you were obliged to confess or to hear read out, one by one, from the pulpit of a church full of all sorts of people, every sin which you have committed from your earliest childhood, with every minutest detail belonging to them; and thence infer how much greater will be the shame of the damned at hearing all the vices of their lives proclaimed in this way, or rather far more distinctly, not before six or eight thousand persons, but in the assembly of all human beings in the universe. How gladly would they bury themselves a hundred fathoms underground to escape so intolerable an ignominy! How they will call on the loftiest mountains, "Fall on us, cover us," to avoid the far heavier load of that public infamy! And how infinitely will this confusion be increased by the reproaches of their Sovereign Judge, Who will then, with an angry countenance, rebuke them by recounting His innumerable favours, and all that He has done for

their salvation, contrasting with these their want of correspondence with His love, and their audacious behaviour to Him all their lives, preferring the meanest creatures to Him, turning their backs upon Him with no respect, trampling His laws underfoot without any fear, and so choosing to obey the devil, their greatest enemy, rather than Him, their most loving Father. Will not these reproaches pierce their hearts more keenly than a dagger—reproaches to which they can only reply that they are most true, that there have been no bounds to their guilt, and that there is no punishment, however terrible, which they have not merited a thousandfold?

IV. Consider the two sentences which the Judge will pronounce after examining the cause and life of each person: the first, that sentence of exceeding joy for those on the right hand: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "Come, happy souls, who have obeyed and served Me faithfully on earth: come, and in reward for that faithful service reign with Me for ever in the highest heaven, in possession of the glory for which I created you, satiated with the perfect beatitude which I Myself enjoy." Who can imagine the immense bliss with which the elect will be filled, the loving humility with which they will give thanks to our Lord on hearing so sweet an invitation? They will declare that they have done nothing to merit so immense a recompense, and they will acknowledge it to be solely of the marvellous and infinite liberality with which it is His pleasure to crown by this last and priceless favour, so many, many others which He so abundantly lavished on them throughout all their lives. And, on the contrary how terrible beyond words will be the sentence heard with unutterable horror by those on the left hand: "Depart from Me, you cursed,

into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. Depart hence, treacherous, infamous, miserable race, unworthy of standing before Me. What have you to do with Me, to Whose kindness you have been so ungrateful, against Whose sovereignty you have so often rebelled, Whose laws you refused to obey, Whose Majesty you have insulted by sins so flagrant? I curse you, I excommunicate you, I strike your names out of My book; I renounce for ever the love which I have borne you during your whole life. I will no longer think of you except to punish you. Begone hence, with the devil whose service you have preferred to Mine; henceforth you shall live for ever with and under his tyranny. That fiery prison which I prepared, not for you, but for him, shall be for ever your dwelling-place, your home, your final abode." Is not each of these words more terrible, more full of overwhelming power than any thunderbolt? And when they burst upon them, what will those wretched ones then say? "Alas! Lord, will You thus abandon us, and drive us for ever from before You? It is true we have deserved it; but remember that we are Your creatures; remember Your own unspeakable mercy and goodness; remember that more than fatherly love which urged You to shed Your Blood, and to die upon a cross for us. Mercy, pardon, pity, most gracious Judge! We do not beg You to annul the sentence pronounced upon us, only to mitigate its rigour. Banish us from Your presence, and from the company of Your elect, but not for ever, condemn us to the society and the punishment of the devils but not eternally!" Such will be the prayer of those unhappy souls; but it will be utterly in vain: its only result will be to bring down on them still bitterer reproaches from the Judge. "Do you dare, miserable wretches, to appeal to Me by My own Blood,

which you have always trampled on by your sins? Do you dare to implore My mercy, which in all your lives you regarded only to offend Me more audaciously? No; the time is past when you might hope for forgiveness. That very mercy is a motive of My condemning you; that very Blood which I shed for your salvation cries for vengeance against you. Sentence has been given, and though you should pray and weep for all eternity, it will never be commuted in the least degree. Depart without hope of indulgence, without all help, all pardon, all pity, *in æternum*."

V. Consider the execution of these two sentences, that is, the departure of each class to its allotted place. "And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting." On the one hand, with triumphant solemnity never seen before, full of joy, radiant with a wondrous light, and singing festal hymns, the elect will go up to the heavenly palace appointed for them, there to dwell and rejoice for ever: "and so shall they be always with the Lord." Then, on the side where the damned are placed, the earth will open under their feet, and in horrible confusion, one over the other, with hopeless tears and frantic shrieks, cursing God, themselves, and all creatures, they will fall headlong into a frightful abyss of flames. And when they have all sunk into it, the earth will close over their heads, and they will be left for ever buried in that subterranean prison. And thus will the trial and the fate of every soul be for ever decided without a possibility of change for all eternity: for what each individual is on that day, such will he continue for all days and years and ages to come. He who is blessed then will be blessed for ever; he who is miserable then will be miserable for ever. "In what place soever it shall fall," whether to the right or to the left, "there shall it be." There is an end of

change, of alterations of good and evil, or joy and suffering, an end of light following darkness, and darkness light. The rapid wheel of time will be stopped for ever, and instead of so many fleeting days and short nights, there will be henceforth but one day and one night, a day of everlasting life and joy and happiness for the elect, a night of everlasting death and misery and despair for the reprobate.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On hell, considered in reference to the pains which are endured there.

SUMMARY.

I. The pain which is common to the soul and body, that is, a perpetual and entire privation of all pleasure. How terrible this is, and how great is the folly of sinners, who for the sake of enjoying an unlawful pleasure, do not hesitate to deprive themselves of all pleasure for all eternity.

II. The pain proper to the body, that is, that it will be tormented in its five senses. Every one ought to believe and consider that these sufferings far surpass all those of this life, and the efficacy of this reflection in restraining from sin.

III. The pain properly belonging to the soul, that is, the extreme affliction in which it will be for ever plunged with all its interior faculties.

I. Consider that the state of the damned in hell being a state of pure misery, necessarily excludes all good, so that to enter it is to bid an eternal farewell to every pleasure, and enjoyment. Go through, in your thoughts, everything from which you are in the habit of receiving delight on earth, such as the light of the day, the sight of the country, intercourse with friends, walking, eating, resting, sleeping, games, hunting, perfumery, music, warmth in winter, coolness in summer, being loved, honoured aud praised, the acquisition of learning or wealth, success in your enterprizes, and the like. The damned have none of these or any such enjoyments; they have lost them for ever, they can never taste so much as a drop of them so long as eternity endures: "The

mirth of the timbrels hath ceased, the noise of them that rejoice is ended, the melody of the harp is silent . . . all mirth is forsaken, the joy of the earth is gone away."[1] Supposing, now, that there were no other punishment in hell than this utter absence of all enjoyment, would not this be sufficient of itself to overwhelm us with such horror, that in order to escape it we should think it a very easy condition to deny our appetites the indulgence of all forbidden pleasure? For man's nature, being made for good, and desiring no other sustenance, cannot live wholly deprived of it. Wherefore, if any one were shut up in an underground prison, without any refreshment for the body or any pleasant impression on the mind, he could not last long in so unnatural a condition, but would die consumed and worn out by mere melancholy. What, then, will it be to have to endure for ever in hell this torturing want, and to know with absolute certainty, "For me there is no more good, no more joy or consolation, no more pleasure of mind or of body. Through all the unending future, I shall never know the meaning of any good, or enjoyment, or comfort. I have for ever lost all capacity for them, all hope of them. I shall live for ever hungry, for ever famished. 'My soul is removed far off from peace, I have forgotten good things.'"[2] And here we see the folly of sinners, who from desire of some single, transitory, and worthless pleasure, such as those of sin are, do not hesitate to incur the eternal deprivation of every good. What blindness and insanity! Is there any lack of innocent pleasures and enjoyments which they may partake of, and so spend their lives joyously, as so many servants of God do? And what madness, for the sake of tasting, in addition, this or that forbidden pleasure, to deprive themselves for all eternity of every sort of

[1] Isaias xxiv. 8, 11. [2] Lament. iii. 17.

enjoyment! They say it is too hard and difficult for them to live now without these bodily gratifications. Let them, then, infer how far more hard and difficult it will be to live not for a few years, but for endless ages, not only without any pleasure of the body, but without any of body or mind, and thus, let the very excess of their attachment to pleasure be an incentive to them to hate and avoid all sinful pleasures, which by a momentary indulgence of the soul, render it incapable of both this and every kind of delight.

II. Consider that in addition to the privation of every good, there is besides, in hell, the suffering of every evil. For to dwell, in the first place, on the evils proper to the body, it will be tormented in all its senses beyond what it is possible to imagine. The eyes will be tormented by the pungency of the smoke, by the glare of that sulphurous fire, dull, lurid, and more dreary than darkness itself, and by the sight of the devils, present in their terrible forms. The ears will be tormented by the despairing cries of that multitude of the damned, who will never cease shrieking and howling, and deafening the hearer with the wildest curses and blasphemies, in that close and crowded cavern. The nostrils will be tormented by the intolerable stench of that putrid and infected air, offensive from the presence and breath of so many bodies heaped together, and unrelieved, as elsewhere, by any way of issue or breath of wind. The taste will be tormented by the fiercest thirst, and by the continual burning of the fire. Lastly, the touch, that is, the sense of all the members in general, will be tormented by the pressure and constraint of an unchanging posture, and by the scorching flames which will envelope them externally, and penetrate to the inmost marrow of those miserable bodies. And I would have you dwell particularly on this, as being a kind of torture both most cer-

tain by our faith, and also from its sensible violence, the most horrible of all that can be conceived of in hell; considering what, and how intolerable a torment it must be to live constantly plunged in fire from head to foot—face and eyes, and all the most sensitive parts of the body, to have the mouth and throat, the brain and entrails, the bones and veins full of fire; to dwell in fire, to be clothed with fire, to have one's bed in fire, to breathe fire. More than this—to be, in a certain sense, transformed into fire, as red-hot iron just out of the furnace is so completely penetrated by fire as to resemble it rather than iron. From all this it will be very easy to draw the conclusion that it is the height of folly to incur the most remote danger of falling into hell for the sake of base and transient pleasures. O sinners, yet most dear, "have you understood all these things?" Suffer me to ask you, as Christ asked His hearers after speaking of the fires of hell: "Have ye understood all these things?"[8] Do you comprehend sufficiently what these fearful torments are? Do you conceive the terror which you ought, in thinking of their fury? I know that sometimes, when looking at a burning furnace, with its flames flashing out in one part, glowing more fully in another, and those bursts of scorching heat which it sent out, I could not help shuddering at the thought what would become of me if I were flung and shut in it, what would be the suffocation, the burning, the agony, the consuming of flesh, the violent death of anguish that I should have to suffer. How much greater horror, then, should you feel of that furnace of inextinguishable flames prepared in hell, in which, if you do not amend your life in time, you will have to live, not for a short hour, but for endless ages, always burning and dying without ever being consumed or ceasing to live?

[8] St. Matt. xiii. 51.

"Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"[4] and you—who are so delicate that you think it unendurable to wear rather a rough shirt, to lie on a mattress which is not soft enough, to stay in rather too warm a room in summer—how will you bear that scorching, melting, and burning of your wretched flesh, which even if it were bronze or adamant, could not withstand the constant and furious attacks of that devouring element? Is it, then, possible, that you will not take pity on yourselves, and that, careful as you are to preserve your bodies from the slightest discomfort, you will not hesitate to expose them to such excessive suffering and anguish? It is commonly said that you sin through too much love for them: on the contrary, instead of showing excessive love for them by sinning, you rather hate them as much as their fiercest enemies or the devil himself could do, who, not certainly from love, but from extreme hatred of them, urges you to grant them now those forbidden pleasures which will hereafter be punished by most grievous and eternal torments. Do I hear you reply, that if you are condemned to hell you must have patience? You know not what you say, when you answer so. Patience in hell? Ah, there is no patience, be it ever so firm, so constant, so invincible, that can endure that extremity of suffering. Patience! instead of it, you will howl and rave and struggle in mad despair if you once fall into that abyss, even though you had to stay there only for an hour, not for all eternity. Oh, enter into yourselves, and remembering that it is no idle talk when we speak of being condemned to unquenchable flames; abhor and shun beyond all earthly evils those sinful pleasures which the enemy of your salvation uses as a deceitful bait to drag you, by the murderous hook concealed in

[4] Isaias xxxiii. 14.

it, to burn for ever with him in hell. For if, supposing that the room in which you were committing sin, were to take fire, the fear even of the temporal death with which you were threatened would make you leap instantly from your bed, and entirely forget whatever pleasure you were taking; you can easily see how much more forcibly you ought to be driven to forsake sin and think no more of all its enjoyments and delights, by the fire—not temporal, but eternal, which is kindled for you in the depths of hell, and which may swallow you up as often in your life as there are moments when you may die a sudden death.

III. Consider, that intolerable as are these bodily and exterior sufferings, those by which the soul, that is, all the interior faculties, of the damned will be tormented, are not only as great, but far more terrible. For, as to the memory; when by means of it he goes over the life he led on earth, he will find nothing in it, the recollection of which is not a dagger in his heart. And above all, and causing a keener anguish than all, will be the thought for ever present to him, of the causes of his eternal perdition: all of them things of no consequence, and which he might have easily avoided; such, for instance, as the gaining of a little money, some human respect, the gratification of a feeling of revenge, or some transient pleasure. At which recollection, he will break out into words the more full of sorrow from the uselessness of his repentance: "O miserable that I am, for what trifles have I come to this great misery! 'I did but taste a little honey with the end of a rod—and behold, I must die.'[5] Were those paltry delights of sin, then, so great, that for the sake of enjoying them I should cast myself, soul and body, into this abyss of everlasting torments? Would it have cost so much to despise that base inte

[5] 1 Kings xiv. 43.

rest, to restrain that angry impulse, to renounce that animal enjoyment? Ah, how great was my folly! Why did I not do so when I should thus have so easily escaped these intolerable sufferings, which now I must bear for ever?" Then, still further to increase his torment, he will call to mind the many and timely aids to his salvation granted him by God throughout his whole life, of which he might so easily have availed himself; and from neglecting which, while there was time, he is now hopelessly lost. "How often did my Confessor tell me not to trifle with God, not to abuse His mercy by continuing to offend Him, not to put myself again in those dangerous occasions, to which it was greatly to be feared that I should one day yield. But I was deaf to his counsel—and now, too late alas! I see, to no purpose, and with unutterable pain, how true and salutary it was. That year, when I made the Spiritual Exercises, I had a vivid perception how terrible a thing it was to be eternally lost, and I resolved to amend my life and to die rather than sin again. Oh, if I had kept that resolution I should now be saved. But at the end of one or two months, it died away, and I, wretched man, began leading a worse life than ever, and thus I have fallen into this state of utter perdition, where there is nothing left to me but to bewail with ceaseless sighs and tears my irreparable error. Once, when I heard of the sudden death of that acquaintance of mine, God touched my heart, leading me to reflect that the same thing might happen to myself: and, moved by salutary fear, I kept myself from sin for some weeks. Would that it had been, not for some weeks only—but for the rest of my life! I should not then be in the midst of these horrible flames, where I am now, for lack of perseverance, plunged without the hope or possibility of ever being released. O fool! and blind and madder than all madmen; why did I not

think of this before? Why did I not consider, when I had time and opportunity?" Such will be the motives of bitter and inconsolable anguish which the miserable man will find in the remembrance of his past life, on account of which he will for ever curse the grievous errors he committed, gnawing his lips at the thought of having so ill attended to the all-important business of his eternal salvation, and making acts of contrition enough to break his heart, "because he knew not the time of his visitation."

In the second place, again, as to the understanding, two terrible ideas from which he can never turn away, will always be present to him. The first will be the greatness of the beatitude for which God created him, which so many whom he knew formerly are now enjoying in heaven, and which he too would be enjoying if he had only made use on earth of the many and easy means afforded him for obtaining it, but from which, in consequence of his folly in neglecting them, he now sees himself shut out for ever. "Ah, it was not that I might be tortured here with devils, but that I might reign in heaven with the angels, that God gave me my being. That was the happy end, that was the place of my everlasting abode. Had I chosen to do the little that was necessary, and that was in my power to do, to get there, I should be there now in a state of eternal and perfect beatitude, freed from every evil, possessed of every good, like that fellow-student, that brother, that servant of mine, and so many others who lived with me in the world. Yes, there they are, and there will be for ever, happier and more glorious than words can say, whilst I, through my exceeding and irreparable folly in neglecting the opportunities which I had of going there, am for ever banished thence: and never will there be an end either of their immensity of bliss in that happy palace, or of my fearful

sufferings in this dungeon of torment. O Paradise, Paradise, wilt thou then never be mine? Have I for ever lost thee? Have I really exchanged thee, the height of all good, for hell, the extremity of all evil? O fatal exchange! O woful loss! O misery never enough to be lamented! 'My end and my hope is perished from the Lord.'"[6] The other image, no less indelibly imprinted on his understanding, and full of anguish beyond words or thought, will be that of the eternity of his state of misery. For, being always before him it cannot but be that he will always feel it, and that in every moment of time this, his present hell will be, as it were, multiplied by the innumerable future moments during which as he knows most certainly, and perceives most vividly, he will have incessantly to endure it.

In the third place, consider the pain that belongs particularly to the will: in addition to the deep and most inconsolable melancholy in which he will be continually plunged in consequence of his state of misery, void of all comfort, despairing of all help, abandoned for ever by God and all creatures; in addition, I say, to these agonies and sorrows, greater than our imagination can conceive, he will be constantly agitated by furious feelings of rage and hatred against the devils, against God, and against himself. First, then, their hearts will be consumed by the most violent fury against the devils on account of the torments by which they will be continually venting their cruelty upon them. And this fury will be all the greater from their perceiving that they are utterly incapable of avenging themselves, and that it is utterly useless to rage against them, to gnash their teeth, and to pour forth reproaches, for these proud spirits, instead of being in the least displeased or offended will only make a jest of their feeble and impotent

[6] Lament. iii. 18.

wrath, and torture them more spitefully, and insult them with bitterer gibes. "Yes, yes, miserable creature, rage and storm as much as you like, till you burst with hatred and fury, your anger and madness are all in vain: for all eternity, whether you will or not, you must remain in our clutches, under our feet, subjected to our power. You may exert your rage with your tongue, and we with our hands: we shall see which of us best plays his part." And thus their anger and fury, and attempts to revenge themselves, coming into collision with a power greater than their own, and beaten back still more furiously than they were hurled against their enemies, will but the more violently attack and consume the will from which they proceeded. In like manner will they vent their rage against God, the author of their endless misery: and however furiously they curse and blaspheme Him and call Him tyrannical, cruel and unjust, wishing and imprecating every evil upon Him, they see and know all the while, that all these curses and blasphemies are utterly powerless, and cannot diminish in the smallest degree the infinite beatitude and essential glory of an Enemy so sovereign, so omnipotent, and so invulnerable, Who hears from the highest heaven, as it were, without hearing, with immovable tranquillity, and without any sentiment save that of derision at those vain howlings of feeble fury. "The wicked shall see, and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away; the desire of the wicked shall perish."[7] Lastly, that there may not be a person in the world against whom he does not rage, he will intensely hate himself, desiring to tear himself to pieces and to annihilate himself, detesting his existence, and lamenting nothing more than that he ever received it; and for that reason cursing God Who created him, and his father and mother who gave him birth, and

[7] Psalm cxi. 10.

the day and hour in which he was born. A hatred this, surely most strange and contrary to nature, and, so to speak, made up of contradictions: for it has its source in love of the object of hatred, that is from anger at its misery: and therefore it may well be called a monstrous hatred, such as could only be entertained by one who, through extremity of suffering and fury, is quite out of himself, and does not know what he wants. These tumultuous, bitter, miserable and tragical sentiments, then, are that worm, which will never cease, for all ages, to devour the soul of the wretched man who is damned; and this will be a suffering and a torture in comparison of which the fire, and all the other torments which will afflict the body, may well be called light. Consider them attentively, and having conceived the exceeding horror, which cannot but be felt by every one who fixes his mind upon them, draw the conclusion how senseless and more stolid than the brutes that man is, who, knowing most certainly by faith that it is sin which dooms us to so supreme and terrible a misery, can yet be enticed to commit it by any inducement whatsoever of this life.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

On hell in regard to certain conditions of its pains.

SUMMARY.

I. The pains of hell will have no end: how greatly this increases the fear and horror of them.

II. That no man living on earth is safe from the danger of suffering them. How careful, therefore, should we be in guarding ourselves from so terrible a danger, and how determined to make use of every means which may assist us to escape it.

III. That these pains are deserved by our sins; and that it is nothing but a miracle of Divine mercy that we have not already been enduring them a long time, according to our deserts. Therefore, in grateful acknowledgement of so signal a favour, we ought henceforth to serve God with no less, nay, rather with far greater perfection than He would be served by a soul which, after suffering for many years in hell, should have been taken out of it and again sent to live on earth. For we have received a far greater favour in never being sent there at all, than would have been received by that soul in being delivered thence after some time.

I. Consider that if the pains of hell on which you have been meditating had to be endured but a thousand years, they ought still, considering their severity, to cause us so great a terror that we should esteem it a most welcome condition of being safe from them to give up every good, and endure every evil of this life. My good God! to be plunged in fire for a thousand years! Who could bear it? Who could hear of it without shuddering? It would be a terrible thing to be there for a whole day only; most terrible to continue in such suffering for a year. And what then shall we say, not of ten, or a hundred, but of a thousand years?

And yet, if it were to be announced to the damned that their torment in that fire would be but for a thousand years, it is impossible to express how inestimable a favour they would consider it, and how greatly it would lessen their anguish. But never can they have this alleviation: for after burning there for a thousand years, these will be followed by another thousand, and those again by thousands and thousands more, and these, let them be multiplied ever so often, can only be called an infinitesimal portion of the thousands to come in which they will still be burning there. This is why it is the custom to liken eternity to a circle, a figure which has neither beginning nor end. And as a person walking in a circle finds himself, after having gone round it, again at the beginning, and however often he does this, will never come to a point of which he can say, "This is the end of the circle," so when the soul of the damned has entered that most fearful circle of its miserable eternity, it will continue for ever going round it, that is to say, suffering to-day, suffering to-morrow, suffering this year, suffering next year, and all future years without ever finding a way of escape. And in order the better to conceive this, imagine the vastest length of time to which your thoughts can reach, composed, for instance, of as many ages as there would be grains of sand, so closely packed together as to leave no spot empty, filling the vast space between the heavens and the earth. And surely such a length of time is beyond calculation, and can only be conceived in a very confused way by our limited understanding; yet, compared with eternity, what is it? Far less than a single drop of water to the ocean: for there is, indeed, some proportion between these two, and the drop is a determinate part of the ocean: that is to say, so much less than it, and no more. Therefore, subtract from the ocean so many

drops of equal size, and it is less by so much, and if this subtraction of more and more drops were to be continued, it would at length, after a certain number had been subtracted, be completely exhausted, and come to an end, since it contains only a certain number of these little drops. Whereas, the duration of time which you have conceived has no sort of proportion to eternity, and cannot be called a determinate part of it, that is so many times and no more less than it, because it is less beyond any determinate or determinable number of times. It follows, therefore, that eternity contains more and more of those vast durations of time, without limit and without number, and however many may be subtracted from it, one after another (as very many will be during its interminable course), so far from possible is it that eternity can be exhausted thereby, that it is not even lessened by the millionth part, but remains as immense and infinite as it is now, and as it was before a single day of it had elapsed. See, then, how long the damned have to suffer in hell. They will suffer for as many ages as are the grains of sand which would fill the space between heaven and earth. And when all that time has passed, and—long as you see that it will be before this is so, yet in the infinite course of the many more such periods during eternity, a day will come when it has entirely passed—they will continue to suffer for as long a space again, and so on for hundreds and thousands and innumerable similar spaces of time. In short, the measure of their sufferings will be their whole future eternity. And yet, however much this eternity continues to advance, it may nevertheless be said to be always beginning, since it is always at an equal, namely, an infinite, distance from the end, and although it has run a longer course to-day than yesterday, yet it has as long a course to run to-day as it had yesterday, because in every assign-

able difference of time an infinite space remains for it to run; in like manner, they too, though they go on suffering longer and longer, may always be said to be beginning to suffer, since they are always at an equal, namely, an infinite distance from the end, and although the soul that entered hell a century ago has suffered there longer than that which did so yesterday, yet the former has as long a time to suffer as the latter, for they will both go on suffering for ever and ever. What a destiny! one, surely, which cannot be heard of without bewilderment and horror! To suffer pains which, from their severity and multitude, would be intolerable if they were to last but for a day, and to have to suffer thus for ever as long as eternity lasts, as long as God is God! Suppose that you were condemned to no more than to lie in bed for a year without changing your position. How distressed you would be at hearing that this was to be so! How weary and impatient at enduring it! How would the year seem an age to you! And would not the bed seem hard and painful as a rack? I really believe that to escape from this long and grievous state of motionlessness you would offer to endure severe torments for one or two weeks, so intolerable would be the suffering, apart from any other, of continuing for a whole year in one position. What, then, will it be to lie in hell, not on a soft bed, but in the midst of scorching flames—not for one year, but for all the endless years contained in eternity? Ask yourself, I pray you, what will it be? And why, my good God, do men think so little about it? Why do they take so little pains to consider so important a point? Why, instead of going away as far as possible from that fearful gulf, do they, on the contrary, hasten, crowding one after the other, along the roads which lead straight to it, and jest and dance and sleep on the brink of its terrible mouth, as though

it were some refreshing fountain, without ever reflecting on the supreme and endless misery of him who falls into it, or on the continual and hourly threatening danger of doing so, in which they are? "Oh, that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end!"[1]

II. Consider that hell being made for those only who merit it with full freedom and advertence, it might seem a metaphysical case, and morally impossible that any one should choose thus to merit it, and that, therefore, all the grievousness and eternity of its pains need no more terrify us than do the eruptions of Etna. And as when we are told that there have burst from that mountain torrents of flame, sufficient to lay waste whole provinces, we hear the account without any alarm or terror, as being a thing in no way affecting us, because we know that Etna is in Sicily and that we are at home, and that therefore that frightful furnace has no power to harm us unless we go voluntarily to throw ourselves into it, an act of madness which we are sure never to commit; so in like manner, when we hear there exists a hell, that is, a subterranean prison of fire, in which those who are condemned to it are eternally devoured by those inextinguishable flames, for ever burning and never consumed by them, I say, that when we hear this article of faith, terrible and certain as it is, spoken of, we ought not to be in the least terrified, but to answer with an unmoved countenance and a quiet mind: "What is it to me? However terrible a place hell may be, it is not for me; for no one is sent there except for actions committed with full knowledge and free will and I consider it such madness to do with advertence anything by which I should merit condemnation to that everlasting misery, that I hold it to be a case of

[1] Deut. xxxii. 29.

moral impossibility that I should ever do so. The more terrible, therefore, that hell is, the less does it frighten me, as this is all the greater security against the insanity of my ever choosing to merit it." Such, I say, would appear to be the ideas and feelings with which we should regard this subject, considered in itself. So that, as no man of good conduct has any sensation of fear at the sight of a gibbet, because of his firm resolution, and consequently the moral certainty that he has, of never committing murder or other grievous crimes for which that is the punishment decreed by human justice, so, supposing a similar resolution and confidence of not transgressing the laws of God from any earthly motive, he should think with the same calmness and without any fear, of hell, as a punishment which is due only to voluntary transgressors of the Divine law. But it is not so, for, either through want of faith or want of consideration, or both together, we see men leading such bad lives that the greater part of them, instead of looking upon it as an extraordinary and morally impossible thing for any one of them voluntarily to walk in the road leading to hell, complain that they find nothing harder than to take any other. And so far is it from being a metaphysical case for any one to be found who has fallen into that most fearful pit, that it can scarcely be believed, and never sufficiently deplored, how commonly and of what countless numbers this is true. Let us take the testimony of that Chancellor of Paris who appeared after death to his bishop, and having told him that he was lost, added that the crowds of souls who were continually falling, one after another, into the abyss of hell was as great as the number of snowflakes in January, so that he thought the Day of Judgment was already come, and that there were no more people left in the world. "We in hell believed that the

Day of Judgment had come, for souls fall into hell even as the snow falls from the heavens." So that in order to swallow up so large a multitude, hell is obliged, according to the expression of Isaias, to stretch its greedy jaws to the full extent: "Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds." And who shall go down into it? Beggars only? Only ignorant and common persons? Not so; but those of the greatest consideration: "And their strong ones, and their people, and their high and glorious ones shall go down into it."[2] From which it is clear that although, considered in itself, the madness of throwing oneself into hell appears monstrous and incredible, it is nevertheless an insanity but too common amongst men, and one from which neither I, nor you, nor any one, can feel safe as long as he is living in the world. If, then, we put on the one side the unspeakable importance of escaping hell, and on the other the absolute possibility which exists for us all of falling into it, everybody who has meditated on how terrible a thing it is to suffer for all eternity in the midst of those intolerable flames, ought, unless he is utterly mad, to take an efficacious resolution (for it is a thing which rests with him) that he will not for any consideration whatsoever be damned, and will neglect no means of securing himself from so supreme an evil, and, since there is no way of escaping eternal damnation but the avoidance of all sin, never to consent to commit it from any possible earthly temptation or motive. "As for me, this point is fixed and decided for ever: I must escape hell. Let who will go there, I must not—no, not for anything; not though I should lose every temporal good, and suffer every temporal evil; for all such things are but trifles compared to the severity of the pains which are

[2] Isaias v. 14.

endured there eternally. What must I do then to ensure so important a matter in the most infallible way? To have recourse without any delay to the Sacrament of Penance immediately after having sinned is a most useful means, but not entirely certain; for it may, and not unfrequently does happen, that a person dies in the very act of sinning, and then the soul is irreparably lost, without any possibility of making use of these means. Is there then no infallible way of settling things rightly but that of not sinning? No, there is no other means of certainly escaping hell save this. Therefore, as I have firmly resolved at all risks to avoid hell, so do I likewise resolve to avoid sin. But to do this always will be difficult. No matter; is an eternity in hell so light an evil that every possible difficulty should not be overcome in order to be secured against it? And then, to what does all this difficulty amount? To nothing, surely, but to a faithful observance of the most wise and just law of God, that is, to abstain from the few pleasures forbidden by it, and to practise the few acts of virtue which it enjoins. And is it possible that I can think this difficult, and so a thing to be afraid of, when by means of it I shall certainly escape from an eternity of torment in hell? Oh, far harder, far more painful things ought I to perform with the utmost readiness if they were required for a certainty of such importance. Not only ought I to observe every point of God's law, but also to bind myself by the rules of the severest religious order. I ought to be ready to pass my life buried in a cavern, like Antony, or standing on a pillar like Stylites. I ought to expose my body to be tormented with pincers, with leaden balls, with the rack, with iron hooks, with red hot plates, and to every other torture which the bravest champions of Christ endured for the faith.

Away with this womanish softness, this childish dread, when it is a question of everlasting torment. That man does not understand what hell is who can think that laborious and difficult which is the only sure means of escaping it. For my part, far from considering it a great thing to avoid all mortal sin for so inestimable a gain, I do not see how I could obtain it at a less cost; and to call such a price dear seems to me much more absurd than it would be to esteem liberty of life dearly purchased with a penny." Thus firmly resolved never for any motive to commit sin, that is, never, for any motive to run the risk of hell, ought every one to be at the end of this meditation who has made it seriously. And any one who at the end of it is not convinced that to abstain from sin is not only not difficult, but that to commit it is a thing so monstrous that it could never be thought of by a wise man, shows plainly that he has not rightly understood how supreme an evil, surpassing all other horrible evils, it is to burn for all eternity in hell. He ought, therefore, to set himself to reconsider it with greater seriousness till a lively image of it is impressed upon his mind. And when this is the case, knowing well that to sin mortally is nothing short of exposing oneself to the danger of falling into that abyss of eternal misery, he will perceive that there is no folly so insane, nor one that he ought so carefully to exclude from his heart as that of committing a mortal sin.

III. Consider that if you have sinned mortally but once in your life you have merited hell, and consequently that you deserve to be there—not meditating in this room on the pains which are suffered there, but actually suffering them in that everlasting prison. Reflect therefore, on the first mortal sin which you remember having committed, and ask yourself: "If I had died then, where should I be? Alas, in everlasting anguish,

everlasting lamentation, everlasting despair. If, then, that is the miserable condition in which I should have been for so many years, and yet I am not in it, it is from the pure mercy of God, Who has granted me time to forsake sin, and to enter the way of salvation again. Hence it will be easy to draw the conclusion that the most loving gratitude and perfect service are due to Him from you for so inestimable a benefit. And in order the better to understand this, imagine God stooping over hell, fixing His eyes on a soul which has been for a hundred years in that horrible abyss of torment, and saying to it: "What do you promise to do for My service if I deliver you from these flames, which you well know that you deserve for ever?" What would be the reply of that soul to so unhoped for a proposal? "O Lord, if You will deliver me from these torments I promise to serve You better than You have ever been served by any of Your saints, confessors, martyrs, anchorets, or monks. I will labour night and day for You. I will do this, suffer that—everything that I can think of, everything that I am capable of." Do you suppose there is anything which the soul would not promise in order to escape hell? And how, comparing them with the flames to which it was there condemned for ever, would it laugh at all the sufferings and pains which could possibly be endured on earth, even were they to continue to the Day of Judgment! And when once again placed in the world, how carefully would it abstain from even the very least sin! How light would it make of every penance and labour! How calmly and readily would it accept every kind of adversity, sickness, insult, or evil that could possibly be laid upon it by God or man. Suppose such a case, I say; nay, in order that it may move you more powerfully, suppose it to be your own, that is to say, that you died in committing your first mortal sin, that you have

been tormented in hell for ten or twenty years, and that God now offers to allow you to live in the world again if you will serve Him with the perfection you ought. Then, after considering the great promises that you would make, and the new and holy life that you would henceforward lead in His service, go on to say to yourself: "It is certain that I have received a greater grace from God, and am more indebted to Him for having spared me the hell which I have merited for so many years, than if, according to this imaginary case, He had been pleased to deliver me from it to-day, after having condemned me thither, and allowed me to be tormented in those intolerable flames for ten or twenty years. Just as a criminal who had deserved to be condemned for life to the galleys would be more indebted to a prince who completely pardoned him than he would be if, after keeping him there for three years, the prince were to give him leave to come out. If then, supposing that God had remitted in my case, not the pains of hell, but only their everlasting duration, there would be no earthly good which I should not readily relinquish, nor any evil which I should refuse to suffer in order to please Him, but that, on the contrary, I should consider it all as nothing compared to the eternal privation of all good and endurance of all evil, which would now be my due for my sins, and from which, after experiencing it for a few years, He had, by His unspeakable mercy, delivered me: how much more should I be prepared readily to embrace and willingly to endure—nay, to count as nothing every kind of labour, discomfort, and suffering which I may have to bear for His service, in gratitude for the so much greater mercy that He has shown me in not condemning me to hell for even one day? And of what detestable ingratitude should I be guilty if, after receiving so incomparable a favour, I were to forget those quenchless

flames, in which I deserved to be at this moment, and which I had escaped by His mercy only, and refuse to endure any suffering which I had to bear either to fulfil His law better, or to please Him more during the brief space of this present life!" Argue thus, I say with yourself, and whenever in the course of your future life you receive any injury, or are overtaken by any serious disaster, or have any extraordinary difficulty to overcome in God's service, compare that injury or disaster or difficulty, all of which are transitory things, lasting for a very short time, with the intolerable severity of the flames of hell in which you have deserved to suffer now and for all future ages, and instead of which God is satisfied with requiring of you these temporal and light troubles; and, comparing these two things, you will make light of all earthly calamities, saying, "I have deserved worse, far worse things than these;" even as a certain Drichelmo, after witnessing the pains of hell which had been brought before him by God's Providence, used to say whenever any one urged him to moderate the austerity of the life he led afterwards, "I have seen worse things than these. Do you think this too much, good people? Most certainly you would not say so if you knew what hell is. I have seen things there so terrible, that all which I suffer here is no more than the prick of a needle, the shadow of pain, a mockery of suffering—I have seen worse things than these." From these considerations you may see how intolerable is the audacity of those persons, who when things go ill with them in this world, exclaim, like madmen, "What harm have I done to God that He should persecute me in this way?" Be silent, whoever you may be, who thus blaspheme; close that wicked and sacrilegious mouth. What harm have you done to God? Call to mind the many sins you have committed in the course of your life. Can they be called a light

evil and a small offence? So far from it that each one of them contains so much malice that, if it were the only one, you deserve to burn for it in hell, deprived of all good, for ever. And do you complain that He treats you hardly, because, instead of damning you to that eternal fire, He is contented to punish you with evils which are transitory, and, compared to the intolerable pains of hell very slight indeed? Tell me now, suppose that you had deserved the gallows, and that the judge had commuted your punishment to a day's imprisonment, could you possibly be so ungrateful as to complain that he had injured you, and to say: "What harm have I done that the judge should punish me so?" Certainly such extraordinary and unreasonable complaints could never even enter your thoughts, far less be uttered by your lips. On the contrary, you would wonder at his clemency, and deem yourself infinitely indebted to him, and accept as a very special favour a punishment so much below your deserts; neither could you find words with which sufficiently to thank him who had decreed it. How, then, can you be so ungrateful to God as to complain of Him as though He were punishing you beyond what you have deserved by exchanging the intolerable pains of hell, which are your due, for these troubles, which are far lighter in comparison than a single day's imprisonment compared to the gallows? And why do you not rather declare that you have no words with which to thank Him for such wonderful mercy? Alas, men do not consider what a mere nothing, in comparison of the eternal pains of hell, is all temporal suffering. If they believed in hell, meditated on hell, understood rightly what hell is, there would not be such a thing as impatience in the world.

SIXTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Incarnation of the Divine Word, considered with regard to the primary end for which God chose to become Man: that is, to make full satisfaction for our sins.

SUMMARY.

I. In order to make condign satisfaction for our sins, it was absolutely necessary that God should become Man, and take it upon Himself, because of the impossibility of our making it. How great, then, should we consider the malice of sin, which made so enormous a remedy necessary.

II. The immense and incredible charity of God towards man in thus willing to take upon Himself the satisfaction for his sins, and this because of two conditions which render him utterly unworthy of so great a love: (1) that, in comparison of God, he is viler than a worm; and (2) that he had committed against Him those very offences the penalty and satisfaction for which God willed to take upon Himself.

III. We ought, unless we are without all feeling, to conceive some affection of grateful correspondence with this His surpassing love; and such a correspondence requires more than never again to offend Him: we ought, besides this, to be constantly seeking to make better proof of it by fresh ways of service and returns of love.

I. Consider that it was impossible for man to make satisfaction to Divine Justice for his sins, and so to merit their forgiveness. For since sin, being an offence against God, is an act of infinite malice, so, on the

other hand, must the satisfaction required for it be an act of infinite value; and such an act, it is plain, cannot be made by an agent of finite dignity and power, like man and all other creatures soever. Therefore, even though we had, for this end, performed all the most extraordinary penances which could possibly be invented by a holy hatred of the body, and endured every kind of torture and anguish which has ever been discovered by the cruelty of tyrants for the torment of the martyrs, and made acts of contrition so intense, that the life was crushed out of us and destroyed by the mere vehemence of our sorrow; all this, having a finite value, would in no measure suffice to do away with the infinite malice of a single one of our sins. What, then, remained to be done, or hoped for? A satisfaction of infinite value was required for the healing and forgiveness of the sin in which we were lying. This satisfaction could be made, neither by us, because of our limited nature and power, nor by God, because of His incapacity to take our sins upon Himself, and to suffer the penalty for them. Thus, there appeared to be no hope of help or forgiveness for us, consistent with the claims of Divine Justice, unless (a thing which could never, surely, have been thought of by man or angel) God should become Man, and unite the Divine and human natures in the Person of the Eternal Only-Begotten Son. For, by virtue of this union there would be a Person at once true God, by reason of His Divine, and true Man, by reason of His Human Nature, One, therefore, capable of making full satisfaction for our sins, because as Man He would be able to suffer for them, and as God to impart an infinite value to those sufferings. This, then, was the means which was absolutely necessary for the full payment of the debt which, by sinning, we had contracted to the Divine Justice; and there was no other means possible besides

this. And, hence, I leave you to draw the conclusion, how exceedingly grievous our sins are, for the remission of which no less was needed than that a God should come down from heaven to earth, and be made Man, and pay their penalty at the cost of His sufferings. Surely we must acknowledge that the disease which required so priceless, so excessive, so unheard of, so unimaginable a cure, was malignant and pestilential beyond belief. And, after this, shall we be so delicate as to make much of fasting on bread and water, or wearing a hair shirt, or sleeping now and then on bare boards, for the doing away of our sins? Let us thank God for vouchsafing to take the payment on Himself, for otherwise, though we should have been flayed alive and killed by our penances, it would all have been nothing towards the full satisfaction of our infinite debt.

II. Consider the immense, surpassing, and most marvellous charity of God to man in choosing such means for his redemption. For might He not well have said: "It is true that unless I take upon Myself the burden of making satisfaction for the offences committed against Me by men, they will remain under the sentence of everlasting death, which they justly deserve for them. But what is that to Me? What great merit do they possess, that I should abase My supernal Majesty to their earthly clay, for the sake of redeeming them? Let them pay the penalty which they have incurred by offending Me; and since they have chosen damnation by despising My prohibitions, let them be damned." Most certainly, when we consider the person of man, there was nothing in him but what made him utterly unworthy of being thus loved by God, and therefore enhances beyond all measure these proofs of God's love for him. First, if we consider him as to his natural being; since we see that, in comparison of

God, it is far more vile and contemptible than that of a fly or a worm is compared with himself, therefore he no more deserved to be cared for by God, than flies and worms by us. And hence David considered it a great wonder that this Sovereign Lord should so much as remember so vile a thing, and exclaimed, in astonishment: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"[1] thus leading us to draw the conclusion how far more wonderful it is, that for love of him He should, as it were, have forgotten Himself.

And in order to understand this matter better, let us imagine that you had found a worm, crushed by somebody's foot, and that you were told there was no way of restoring it to life but by stabbing your own heart, and sprinkling it with the life-blood flowing from the wound. Would you love that little creature so much as to restore it to life by such a means? You will answer: "Not unless I were as much without reason as the worm without life. What is the life or death of so mean a little animal to me, that I should give myself a mortal wound to restore it to life?" Such, certainly, would be your answer. And supposing, to put an impossible case, that urged by a feeling of strange and unheard of kindness to that worm, you stabbed yourself to the heart in order to bring it to life again, who is there, who on hearing what you had done, would not be utterly amazed, and say that such an unreasonable excess of affection could only be felt by a madman? But is not this in reality what the Most High has done in redeeming man who, in regard of the Infinite Essence of God, is incomparably more contemptible than any little worm is in regard of man? And yet, notwithstanding, this Sovereign Lord was able so to love that vile worm, that when He beheld him dead and incapable of rising again, as was neces-

[1] Psalm viii. 5

sary, except by His Blood and sufferings and death, He freely offered Himself to endure all this, in order to restore him to life. What an excess, what a miracle, what a refinement, what a very wildness of love is this! Who among us could ever have dared to ask Him for such a favour, to say: "O my great Creator and Lord, I am unable to make satisfaction to Your Justice for my sins, and therefore, I beg of You to take upon Yourself that satisfaction which is due from me for them, by clothing Yourself in my passible flesh, and in it enduring to be scourged, crowned with thorns, and nailed to a Cross?" Every one, without a doubt, would consider such a request absurd, audacious, and presumptuous beyond words, even if it were addressed, not to a God of infinite greatness, but even to an earthly prince, to a father, a brother, a mortal friend. And yet this, which it would never have entered the mind of man to ask, and which, now that it has been done, is so great a strain on our understanding that we could not possibly believe it except on irrefragable authority, this is what He, of His own pure free choice, has done for us, wretched worms of earth, and the meanest of His servants. Add to this, that besides this natural vileness, there was in man another and far greater demerit to prevent his being thus exceedingly loved by God, namely, his having rebelled against Him, and grievously offended Him by his sins: so that God, in order to redeem him, had so to love man, who had offended Him, as to take upon Himself the penalty due for the offences committed against Him. Just as though some one who had been mortally wounded by a murderous assassin, should offer to release him from the punishment of the gallows to which he was condemned, by being himself hung there in his stead.

To return, then, for a moment to the instance before referred to, only changing the worm into a viper, let us

suppose, that after biting your foot, it had been killed by one of your servants, and that you, looking at it, as before, resolved, as the sure and only way of restoring it to life, to stab yourself to the heart. Having put the case, I do not venture to ask whether you would choose to bring it back to life at such a cost to yourself, knowing that you would deride the question as one of the most ridiculously foolish that could be asked. "What!" you would say, "how could I love a reptile that had venomously bitten me, and love it, too, to such a degree as to be willing to kill myself in order to restore its life? Far from that—I would kill it, if it were not already dead." Such, doubtless, would be your feeling towards that viper. But was it the feeling of God towards man, who had turned against Him with far greater malice? Nay, but in order to release the criminal from the punishment of eternal death which he had incurred by offending Him, and from which he had no power of his own to escape, He was pleased to come down from heaven to earth, to take human flesh, and after enduring thousands of cruel torments, to die on the Cross of shame. And are we not stupefied, rapt out of ourselves, dumb, motionless, without the use of our senses, on hearing so strange a marvel? "Behold, how He loved him!"[2] said the Jews when they saw our Saviour weeping at the grave of Lazarus: do thou, O Christian, look upon a God made Man, a God scourged and crowned with thorns, a God nailed to the Cross; Who sheds, not tears only, but all His Blood for thee; yes, look upon Him, and then say in thy heart: "Behold, how He loved me;" me, a vile worm of the earth; me, His disloyal and rebellious servant. What excess of love! so far beyond all human reason that, but for the supernatural light of faith, it would appear a tale, a dream, an incredible chimera:

[2] St. John xi. 36.

"Unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness!" What shall we, what can we say more to command a mercy so incomprehensible? There are no words, nor expressions, nor ideas that are not incalculably below its merit: and if we did not know that it is united with infinite wisdom, we should be compelled to consider it a very witchcraft, madness, and frenzy of love.

III. Consider, that since God has loved you so marvellously, it is required by all right reason that you, on your side, should as well as you possibly can, correspond with His incomparable kindness. What, then, will be the effects of your gratitude? The first, which is most necessary and undeniable, is, that you should be henceforward faithful, resolving most firmly never more to offend so kind and loving a Father. Do you not think that this is a just return? Are you not anxious and resolved to make it? I see that you think this too much. But, Eternal God! can you give a less return to Him Who has done and suffered so much for you, than to keep from offending, wronging, and insulting Him? Why, you are so bound to this, on every ground, that unless you are without all human feeling, you must see that it is impossible to do otherwise. What sort of man would you be not to do so? Would you not be an object of detestation, a reproach to human nature, a monster of ingratitude, such as the world has never seen, if, when God, without any merit, nay, despite the greatest demerit on your part, has suffered a death of agony for you, at the cost of His Blood, to restore the life which you had lost for ever; you were, instead of utterly spending yourself in His love and service, to repay Him with outrage, contempt, and insult? Good heavens! I shudder at the very mention of an ingratitude so strange, so unheard of even among brute beasts. What! to insult and offend,

I will not say a God, but any one soever, who has saved your life, nay, who has given his life for you? Can such a thing be imagined by the mind of man? Can it be regarded as anything but as a monstrous and incredible case, one utterly chimerical? It makes one ashamed to dwell upon a point so plain and free from all doubt. Let this be your unchangeable conclusion, that your first return for the immense goodness of God towards you shall be so to abhor everything that offends Him as to esteem yourself incapable of ever committing it for the future. I say your *first* return, for you see plainly how poor a gratitude, how unworthy of the name it would be to be satisfied with merely not offending so lavish, so loving a Benefactor as God has shown Himself to you; as though you were not bound, by strict justice, to this, apart from all consideration of His gratuitous mercy. Let us suppose that a prince, on seeing one of his servants attacked by fierce assassins, were to rush to help him, and, drawing his sword, to save his life, after shedding much blood in his defence. What would you think of that servant if, when you asked what return he had made to his master for so signal a benefit, he were to reply, that he had not committed any treason against him? Would not every one laugh to scorn such an answer, and say: "Why, my good man, this which you regard as the sum total of gratitude, is no more than a bare fulfilment of the duty to your prince, by which you were bound in justice even when you had received from him no gratuitous favour, to say nothing of so great a one." Therefore, over and above this merely negative return of never offending your Heavenly Benefactor, which, is indeed, just, but utterly inadequate to the infinite gratitude required of you for the wonderful and inexpressible refinements of His charity, you should seek other ways of service entirely free and of supereroga-

tion, by means of which you may correspond with His love, not indeed equally, since there is no gratitude which can be commensurate with its immensity, but at least so far as a poor but most loving debtor can correspond with it.

You may well, then go on to propose to yourself various acts of extraordinary virtue, such as you are free to do or to leave undone, but by which you would greatly please God, and after reminding yourself of the far greater and harder things which He has done for love of you, do not rest till you have resolutely acknowledged that, should the opportunity occur, it is most just that you should perform these acts of love of Him, without considering their difficulty. Imagine, for instance, that while conversing with other gentlemen of your own standing, some insolent person were to strike you on the face: and then say to yourself: "It is certain that I should do what would be very pleasing to God by kneeling at the feet of the bad man who had insulted me, and humbly begging his pardon for having in any way given him cause for anger. Now, in such a case, what should I do? Should I have the courage thus to sacrifice my worldly sense of honour to God? Oh, it is so hard a thing, so derogatory to my position, to which I am not in any way obliged!" True: but was it not an incomparably harder thing, and far more derogatory to the Majesty of God, to offer His adorable Face to be spat upon and buffeted, and to endure every imaginable insult from the audacity of the vilest ruffians, so that He could say: "I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people."[3] He, being bound by no obligation, but urged by pure love for my good, voluntarily stooped to so deep a degradation, without considering how ill it beseemeth so mighty a Sovereign,

[3] Psalm xxi. 7.

how can I love Him less, so as to shrink back from any difficulty or personal consideration, from any acts which can please or do Him service? And in addition to this, I have to remember that He saw in me no merit which could move Him to love me thus, whilst I, besides His infinite loveliness, have another and most powerful motive for loving Him, the tie of gratitude, seeing that He first loved me: so that I cannot, without incurring the shameful brand of ingratitude, love Him less than He has loved me, or do less for Him than He has done for me; least of all refuse to do, for His sake, things which are incomparably less than He has done for mine. Now, then, I am convinced. I have nothing to answer. This humiliation which we are speaking of is a mere nothing compared with those to which for love of my salvation He offered Himself. It would be base indeed, were I to make Him a return so inadequate to His claims upon me. It is in accordance with all right reason that I should make it: this is certain, and I will hesitate no longer. "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready." I am determined, if the case I have imagined should occur, to kneel, for the love of You, before the person who has struck me or spat in my face, or offered me any other grievous insult, to ask his pardon and even to kiss his feet. Yes, I will do so, in spite of every feeling of sensible repugnance, and I will think that I have done nothing in comparison of the far greater things that You have done for me, and for which I am Your debtor. Let us go on to another case. Supposing I had been raised to some great earthly station, should I have courage to decline that exalted dignity for the sake of being more pleasing to God? Did He not voluntarily give up other far higher honours for me, when He came down from the lofty throne of His incomprehensible glory to lead a poor and lowly life

among men for three and thirty years? And therefore, without doubt, He deserves that I, in order to return as best I can, so exceeding a love, should voluntarily give up this far inferior dignity; and if I should be so dazzled by its lustre as to refuse to do so, I should be sadly wanting in the gratitude I owe Him by declining to do even so small a thing as a return to Him Who has done so much more for me. But it is a great thing, you say, to be so exalted. Let us paint it as finely as you please. Was it not a far greater thing to be honoured as sovereign of the universe by innumerable hosts of angels and to receive the adoration of all creatures? And this was the glory and greatness of which the Most High stripped Himself for love of me. What, then, is my resolution? Ah, what a shame would it be to hesitate! If the highest dignity were offered to me, I would decline it absolutely and positively, for the sake of pleasing and making some return to that Sovereign Lord Who condescended to love me so much more. In the same way go on reasoning with regard to other cases, such, for instance, as that of bearing some serious calumny in silence without defending yourself; of exposing yourself in time of the plague to the infection of the disease, and the like, and considering, with regard to each case, how much more God has done for you, and therefore, how base a thing it would be if you were to refuse to make these returns, all inadequate as they are, to His immense love; lastly, resolving, notwithstanding any difficulty and repugnance, to be ready to make them whenever the opportunity presents itself.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the Incarnation of the Divine Word with regard to another end which God had in becoming Man; namely, to teach us the practical way of avoiding sin.

SUMMARY.

I. The root of all our sins in an inordinate affection to the goods of this life, that is, to riches, pleasures, honours, and our own liberty.

II. The most efficacious means of getting rid of this poisonous root is the doctrine set forth by the Incarnate Word in His holy Gospel, which consists almost entirely in four virtues diametrically opposed to the love of these four temporal goods: namely, voluntary poverty, which is opposed to the love of riches; mortification, which is opposed to the love of pleasure; humility, which is opposed to the love of worldly glory; and renunciation of our own will, which is opposed to the love of liberty.

III. Our Lord was pleased not only to be to us the teacher of these four virtues, but to show Himself as their exemplar, practising them with the utmost strictness throughout His whole life, in order the more powerfully to stimulate us to do so.

I. Consider what are the roots of our sins, that is to say, of the spiritual diseases which tend to the death of the soul. You will find that they are four in number, namely, four inordinate attachments to the goods of this life: the inordinate love of riches, the inordinate love of pleasures, the inordinate love of worldly reputation, and the inordinate love of liberty. All of these are as contrary to man's eternal salvation as they are deeply rooted in his nature, there being no one sin which is not the growth of one or other of them, as whosoever examines them individually will clearly

see. If for instance, we contemplate the desire of riches, every one can see the multitude of sins which spring from it: usury, simony, dishonesty, robbery, false witness, homicide, perjury, and all the other acts of fraud and injustice which are committed for the sake of gain. If we consider the love of pleasures, it is enough to say that it is the fatal source from which come all the many breaches of the sixth commandment, which cause the damnation of countless Christians, perhaps of the majority. If we reflect on the love of reputation, who can count the hatred, the vengeance, the quarrels, duels, wars, and other similar excesses which proceed from it, filling the earth with carnage, and hell with lost souls? Lastly, as to the love of liberty, we can see that it is the principal and most universal cause of all sin, since it never happens that man sins except because he chooses to live in his own way rather than according to the law of God. You see, therefore, to what grievous and dangerous maladies our nature is subject, and how careful you should be, if you value your eternal salvation, to use such remedies as have the greatest virtue in cleansing the soul from their baneful contagion.

II. Consider that, for this end, there are no more powerful remedies than those which God made Man brought from heaven for us, and set forth to the whole human race in His holy Gospel, namely, always to go against these appetites of our corrupt nature, shunning entirely those worldly goods at which they irregularly aim, and choosing the contrary evils, which they avoid in every way. And this is done by means of four virtues diametrically opposed to them, which are, voluntary poverty, opposed to the desire of riches; mortification, to the desire of pleasures; humility, to the desire of honours; and the renunciation of our own will to the desire of liberty. Such is the admirable doctrine

proposed to us by the Incarnate Word, as the antidote to our spiritual maladies and the most powerful preservative from sin, which is the same thing as the death of the soul. And, to make this clear, it is enough to glance at His holy Gospel, in which nothing is more inculcated than, in the first place, the divesting ourselves of all worldly possessions. "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor. . . . He who doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be My disciple,"[1] Secondly, it is urged upon us to flee from pleasure, convenience, and comfort, and on the contrary to court sufferings, discomfort, a hard and spare manner of life. "Woe to you who now laugh. Strive to enter by the narrow gate. Whosoever doth not carry his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple."[2] Thirdly, comes the shunning of all reputation and esteem from men, hiding everything which might bring us honour from them, always taking the lowest place, making ourselves like little children, and, on the other hand, delighting in contempt, insult, and wrong to the extent of loving our persecutors, turning the other cheek to him who has struck one, and rejoicing, and counting ourselves blessed when men shall revile us and persecute us, and speak all that is evil against us untruly.[3] The fourth thing is to fight constantly against our own will, to hate it, and in all things to treat it as a will which is our enemy. "If any one will come after Me, let him deny himself. . . . If any man come to me and hate not . . . his own life, he cannot be My disciple."[4] It is evident how useful, rather how necessary for our health, these heavenly prescriptions are; for the origin of all our sins and disorders is nothing but an excessive attachment to

[1] St. Matt. xix. 21 ; St. Luke xiv. 33.
[2] St. Luke vi. 25 ; xiii. 24 ; xiv. 27. [3] See St. Matt. v. 11.
[4] St. Luke ix. 23 ; xiv. 26.

worldly goods; and to correct this there can be no better means than that of continually opposing its impulses, just as the best, nay the only way, of straightening a crooked stick is to twist it forcibly in the contrary direction from that to which it naturally inclines. Therefore, if any one should think it a strange thing to be told to avoid everything which his nature desires, and should reply that he quite sees that he ought not to love gain, sensual enjoyment, the praise of men, and the satisfaction of his own will more than is right, and also that he should not seek to acquire these goods by unlawful means, or to enjoy them in opposition to reason and the law of God, but that, on the other hand, he does not see the duty of avoiding and depriving himself of them so long as he is able to make a legitimate use of them; I should find it easy to convince such a person by answering that the reason is, that the possession and use, even when legitimate, of these goods, tend to foment his innate love for them, and to bring him into manifest danger of being carried away by the force of that love, to seek after and enjoy them even when they are contrary to the Divine law; and that therefore, if he would guard himself from that danger, and provide in the best way for his eternal salvation, he should never comply with his natural love for the goods of this world, but always shun them in the same degree as that love desires them. For by thus constantly acting against its inclinations, it will gradually diminish and die out in the soul, and thus continual progress will be made in rooting out of it the origin of all its sins and disorders. Further, when a remedy has been prescribed by a physician who, we are sure, can neither be deceived himself nor desire to deceive us, his mere authority is a sufficient reason, and it is accepted blindly and unquestioningly by every patient as the best. Since, then, you know beyond all doubt that the

Divine Word has an infallible knowledge of the needs of your soul, and that it is only to supply those needs that He counsels you to give up sensible goods, you ought to acknowledge that this counsel is most profitable for your eternal salvation, and consequently to resolve henceforth seriously to adopt the practice, no matter how repugnant and distasteful to the senses.

III. Consider that the Divine Word, seeing the importance and necessity of this doctrine for the cure of our interior diseases, was not content with simply teaching it, with declaring it in His holy Gospels, but chose likewise to become its Pattern and Prototype, and to practise it most strictly during the three-and-thirty years of His earthly life. For if He has exhorted us to follow voluntary poverty, every one sees how austerely He first practised it, choosing for His birthplace a mean stable, and for His only means of subsistence the labour of His hands, or the aid He accepted from the charity of others. If He preached mortification, who is there that does not know the privations amidst which His life was spent, and the sufferings, torments, and anguish, with which it closed? If He counsels humility, could He have displayed it better than He did in His Passion, in which He stooped to become the lowest of men—nay, "a worm and no man, the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people."[5] If, lastly, He requires of us the renunciation of the whole of our will, what was all His life but one continual practical repetition of these words: "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me?"[6] But why did He choose to submit to these remedies? It is certain, in the first place, that, seeing His absolute immunity from all our spiritual maladies, He had no need of them; and it is equally certain that, on account of the infinite value of each one of His actions, He might,

[5] Psalm xxi. 7. [6] St. John v. 30.

without enduring all this poverty, ignominy, and pain, have redeemed the world by one single tear. What, then, was His motive, without any of these necessities, for leading a life so poor, so hard, so lowly? Certainly, nothing but the desire of thus the more powerfully urging men to make use of these useful but bitter remedies, which He had brought from heaven to give them life and healing, so that, seeing them used by Him, Who had no spiritual malady and needed no cure, those who were sick and did need them might feel less repugnance in adopting them. Surely He has in this manifested a zeal for our good which is wonderful and unexampled. For was it ever heard that a prince who had a servant suffering from a terrible gangrene of the arm, and refusing from extreme sensitiveness to submit to the cutting or cauterization necessary for his cure, bared his arm in his presence saying, "Is it such a great thing, then, to be cut or cauterized?" and merely in order to give courage to that servant, endured the application of the knife or of fire to his own flesh? It is certain that there never was an instance of such a prince in the world, and if such a one should ever be found, he would be the admiration of all for so remarkable an excess of love. And has not the Most High King of glory proceeded to this excess of charity to us, His poor servants? We were all by nature sick of those four maladies, consisting in a too great love of gain, of pleasure, of honours, and of liberty. Most deadly maladies, which were the cause of the daily ruin of innumerable souls; and to heal us of their innate and baneful contagion there was no such powerful remedy to be found as voluntary poverty, mortification, humility, and the renunciation of our own will. But men were too unwilling and indocile even to hear of a remedy so sharp and strange, far less to adopt it. What! when we are able quietly to enjoy our fortune,

are we to choose to reduce ourselves to a state of utter destitution? Instead of leading a life of comfort, ease, and pleasure, are we to embrace one of privation, toil, and suffering? Are we to renounce all human honour and reputation, and to choose rather to be lightly esteemed, despised, contemned, and scorned? "This saying is hard, and who can hear it?"[7] What, then, did He do? Not satisfied with coming down to the earth to teach men the necessity of these remedies, He chose, in order to leave no means untried, to induce them to adopt them at any cost, to be not only the first to enjoin, but the first to give proof of them, as though He said: "Do not accept the mode of cure which I teach, however salutary it is, unless you see Me make use of it, no matter how hard and painful it may be. I go first through those things which you call impossible. If you cannot follow Me when I teach them, follow Me when I go before you in enduring them."[8] What, then, will be our ingratitude, if we do not acknowledge with due affection so marvellous a zeal for our good? And how great will be our pusillanimity, if we continue to refuse those remedies, which, in order to induce us to accept them, and by their means to gain the eternal salvation of our souls, He chose to endure, and for that end willingly bore all the voluntary privations, pains, and sufferings of His most sorrowful life —of His most shameful and agonizing death?

[7] St. John vi. 61. [8] Lactantius.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the obligation we are under, of living in conformity with the doctrine and example of Christ.

SUMMARY.

I. It follows from the considerations of the preceding meditation, that all Christians ought to follow that way of living which was taught and practised by our Lord: that, namely, of voluntary poverty, mortification, humility, and renunciation of our own will. And that, both because it is the surest means of attaining salvation, and in order thus to please Him, Who has done and suffered so much to induce us to consent to so profitable a thing, and because it is very unbecoming that servants and creatures like ourselves should desire to lead a life of greater comfort and honour than was led by Him, our Creator and Lord.

II. The life led by, not one or two, but by the majority of Christians, is the very reverse of the counsel and example which He has left them, for they seek for riches instead of poverty, for pleasure instead of mortification, for honours instead of humility, and for the gratification instead of the renunciation of their own will. And this is a thing most unworthy, unbecoming, and contrary to all reason.

III. Notwithstanding this, there have always been in the Church holy men who have taken the doctrine and the life of Christ as their pattern of living, and who have shown themselves His faithful followers. And we also, if we would be Christians, not in name, only, but also in deed, should do the same, and amending the life which we have hitherto led according to the inclinations of our corrupt nature, enter upon a new one in conformity with the teaching and example of our Lord.

I. Consider, that, having established the truths of the preceding meditation, namely, that the Son of God became man not merely to satisfy by His Death for our sins, but also to show us by the maxims of His

doctrine and by the example of His Life how to avoid sin, and that, for this end, He taught us always to oppose our natural inclinations by means of voluntary poverty, mortification, humility, and the renunciation of our own will, and that, moreover, to move us more powerfully to do this, He was the first to choose this way of life; having, I say, established these points, which are most certain by Divine faith, it follows that all Christians, from the first to the last, seculars no less than religious, ought to follow so sure a guide, by practising as perfectly as they can these four virtues. The first lesson, therefore, which every father should give his children from their earliest infancy, ought to be this: "Beware, my child, of entertaining the desire of massing up riches, and of increasing your fortune. No, my child, do no such thing: for our Lord, when He became Man for our salvation, taught us, on the contrary, to shun riches, and to make ourselves as poor as possible. Be satisfied, therefore, with possessing just what is necessary to live upon, and give all the rest to the poor. Beware, too, of desiring to be honoured and prominent among men. Do not desire it my son, for He has counselled us for our good, to avoid notice, credit, and glory from men, and rather to love contempt and wrong. And you, therefore, if you would be a true Christian and follower of Him, must hide whatever would procure consideration for you, flee from dignities, honourable position, credit and applause; and rejoice on the contrary, whenever you are wronged or scorned or despised." These, I say, and others of the same sort are the precepts which every father should instil into his children from their first coming to the use of reason, and by which every Christian should regulate his life. And I will give three very plain reasons for this. First, because this manner of living is the surest of all

ways for attaining heaven, everlasting salvation, and our final beatitude. The Son of God, the Infallible Truth, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived, has shown and said this to us all: "This is the sure and straight road for reaching your final end. Believe Me, Who know it better than all others, and Who have come down from heaven to earth to show it to you. See; I am the first to enter on it. Let all who desire salvation follow Me." If, then, we are desirous of attaining this end, why do we not follow this Guide, and walk in this direct road? The second reason is this, that by acting in any other way we shall make an ill return for the loving desire which Christ has shown for our salvation, for we shall be refusing the means which He has endeavoured, at such cost to Himself, to make us accept, and thus making of no avail all the labours and sufferings which He endured for our sakes. What a wonder it is! He might have led among us a life beseeming the Son of God, and the King of the universe, a life of ease and magnificence, full of every possible good—and He chose instead, during all His three and thirty years, a life poor and humble, full of want and suffering; and in all this He had but one object, to induce us, by His example, to follow the same manner of life, and that because He knew that to do so is of the greatest importance to our eternal salvation? And shall we refuse to give Him this satisfaction, which has cost Him so much, and in which He has no interest but our salvation? And surely, if He could not better show the exceeding tenderness of His charity towards us, than by the many and grievous sufferings for which He demands to be thus repaid, we cannot give a greater mark of extreme ingratitude to Him, than by not making even this return to His immense merits, to consent to be saved by Him. The third reason is, that it is a most

shameful thing for servants and creatures like ourselves to desire to lead lives of greater honour and ease than He led, Who is our Sovereign Creator and Lord. Suppose that the Pope were now making the stations of the Seven Churches, and that while he went along the street on foot, he was followed by a servant borne at his ease on a litter. What would be the feelings of the spectators at this contrast? Would not every body say to that contemptible man: "Are you not ashamed, base and audacious fellow, to be carried thus at your ease, a mean person like you, while the Pope your master, and the Vicar of Christ, is walking, weary and exhausted?" Exery one, without doubt, would detest such conduct as most disgraceful, repugnant to right reason, and a thing which could not be witnessed without indignation. And this is our case. The Son of God, our King, and the King of the whole universe, is walking, crowned with thorns and laden with His Cross, amidst the mockeries and insults of His enemies; and we, the meanest and lowest of His servants, are following in state, in luxury and refinement, delicately perfumed, reclining in carriages, richly dressed, courting applause and and receiving salutations. Are we not ashamed of such base behaviour? Do we not consider the indecency of such a contrast? Endeavour, then to understand how right it is for all these three reasons, that every one who believes in Christ and professes to be His disciple should regulate his life by that Pattern of Poverty, mortification, and humility, which He has set before us in His life and doctrine: I say, *every one* who professes to be Christ's disciple, whether he be secular or religious, for in announcing the maxims of the Gospel, He made no distinction between one class of persons and another. And as, not religious only, but all men throughout the world were sick of this malady of inordinate love for

the goods of the world, and as therefore, not religious only, but all other men, stood in need of those remedial doctrines, so He has enjoined them not on religious only, but on the whole human race. Indeed, if any difference were to be made, it would seem that as religious, by reason of their retirement from the world and from its attractive objects, have less need of these doctrines, so too, there is less need of their specially applying them to themselves. No secular person, therefore, must deceive himself in this matter, by imagining that Christ proposed evangelical perfection either exclusively or mainly to religious, but let him assure himself that whether he is living in the world or in the cloister, he must, if he would be a faithful disciple and follower of Christ, observe as strictly and fully as possible the counsel He has given, to oppose our natural inclinations in all things. The only difference is that it is easier to do this, which is a duty common to all perfect Christians, in religion, than in the world, because in the former state there is a more special profession of this counsel, and consequently many aids for that object. "You are utterly mistaken and you deceive yourself," says St. John Chrysostom,[1] "if you think that one thing is required of seculars and another of religious." And further on: "It is clear that it is upsetting the whole world to suppose that it is necessary for monks to live with the greatest carefulness, and that the rest of men are at liberty to lead negligent lives: it is not so—clearly it is not so, but philosophical reason requires the same things of all."

II. Consider whether all Christians really live according to this rule, and you will see that they act quite in the opposite way. For, whereas our Lord taught that riches, pleasures, honours, and the gratification of

[1] Lib. iii.

our own will are to be avoided, and on the contrary, that the privations of poverty, sufferings, contempt, and the subjection of our will to that of others are to be courted; they, in direct opposition to this doctrine, avoid by all means in their power all want, inconvenience, and contempt, all binding and subjection of their own will, and there is nothing which they love and seek after more than to heap up wealth, to be steeped in pleasure and enjoyment, to win honour and applause, and to live in all things as they choose: so that no two points can be more directly opposed to each other than the life of Christians and the doctrine of Christ. Certainly, if instead of saying: "Blessed are the poor, the persecuted, and those who weep," He had said: "Blessed are the rich, and woe unto the poor; blessed are they who laugh now, and woe unto the mourners: blessed are those of whom men shall speak well, and woe unto those who suffer persecution;" if, in short, He had exhorted those who desire to follow Him, not to avoid but to seek after worldly goods, not to desire, but to shun the evils of this life, I leave it to every one to decide whether, in such a case, they could more diligently aim at riches, honours, pleasures, and the praise of men, or shrink with greater horror from all poverty, discomfort, humiliation, and contempt, than they do now when He has laid down for them totally contrary rules. Neither is this the fault of a few, but of the majority, and it is common even with those who are called conscientious persons living in the fear of God, even with those who pass for spiritual men, even with those who make profession of a more perfect life in religious communities. For even amongst these there are to be seen a great many persons who are very eager in seeking after worldly goods, their own convenience, honourable posts, the esteem and applause of men, and who feel it very keenly if

they are not supplied with all they want, if they endure any little discomfort, if their reputation is ever so lightly attacked, if any one opposes their plans and wishes. Indeed, this way of living is so ordinary, and has become so much the rule, that it is considered indiscreet, extravagant, and an innovation, to exhort the body of the faithful to the practice of humility and evangelical mortification, although they are most expressly taught by Christ; and when people hear this insisted on, they are surprised, and laugh at it as a piece of folly, saying that these things are not the concern of persons living in the world, not, at any rate, of gentlemen and persons of condition: as though the Gospel were addressed to none but religious, or only to artisans and the lower orders, and not rather to all who profess to be Christians. More than this, to such a pitch has disorder reached, that in Christian countries it is considered mean, and unworthy of a noble mind, to live as a perfect Christian, that is for a man to yield to one who does him wrong, to humble himself to one who insults him, and to practise other like counsels given by Christ to all His followers. Surely this is a strange disorder, and one not to be found in the army, or in philosophy, or any other profession: for nowhere is it accounted a disgrace among soldiers to be a brave soldier, or among philosophers to be an excellent philosopher, or in any other calling to discharge its duties perfectly, as among Christians it is deemed disgraceful, and brings contempt on a man to observe all the counsels of Christ, that is, to be a perfect Christian. What an inconsistency and contradiction of opinion, all the more monstrous for being usual and common! To believe that the Gospel is a doctrine from heaven, to adore every point in it as the oracle of Eternal Wisdom, to be ready to witness to its truth, with one's own blood; and yet to live a life opposed

to its rules, to mock at those who inculcate its practice, and to make its perfect observance a matter of reproach!

III. Consider, that notwithstanding this perverse manner of living of most Christians, there have always been those in the Church of God who have lived conformably to the religion they profess, and to the doctrine of our Lord, which they have kept constantly before them as their model in all their actions, and who have consequently led a life as poor and mortified as possible, despicable in the eyes of the world, and totally opposed to the inclinations of our corrupt nature. Such were St. Francis of Assisi, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Borgia, and countless others—truly great and heroic souls, loyal servants of Christ, Christians not only in name and by Baptism, but by deed and life. Then, when you have admired their holiness, turn to yourself and inquire in what way you have hitherto lived—like these great heroes, or like the mass of the faithful. You will find, that, like the latter, you, too, have been eager to gain as much property and money as possible, to procure every bodily comfort, and to be highly esteemed by men: and on the contrary, to avoid all poverty and suffering, all depreciation of your character: and these, surely, are sentiments and habits directly opposed to the supernatural rule of life composed for us by the Son of God in His precepts and actions. Say, therefore, to yourself: "Alas, I have not lived according to my creed as a Catholic, nor as befits a true follower of Christ. As such, I ought to strip myself of all my possessions, and, on the contrary, I have laboured to increase them. I ought to treat my body as my enemy, and to punish it with all kinds of voluntary austerities, and on the contrary I take pains that it may lack no ease, or pleasure, or indulgence. I ought to love humiliations, insults, and injuries: and there is nothing that I have more sought

after than the esteem, the good opinion, and the applause of men." Lastly, from these most reasonable motives of repentance, confusion, and shame, go on to determine to amend your past way of life, and to practise henceforward, as you ought, the four virtues above mentioned, being convinced that the more perfectly you do so, the better you will fulfil the duty of a true Christian. With this end in view, you ought to set up a high standard, and, with regard to poverty, to resolve either to give up, as religious do, all your worldly possessions, or only to retain just as much as is sufficient for a spare subsistence: with regard to mortification, determine to refuse your body every unnecessary indulgence, and to treat it as hardly as you can, so long as you keep within the bounds of prudence, that is to say, without injuring your health; with regard to humility, resolve to avoid all honour and credit from men, and on the contrary, to rejoice whenever it falls to your lot to be slighted, thought meanly of, to have others preferred to you, and to be despised as a very "reproach of men." With regard to the renunciation of your own will, your sentiments should be equally generous, leading you always to be doing battle with it, and thwarting its irregular appetites. I will only add, that you will find it a great help in undertaking this new way of living as generously and with the greatest profit possible, to regard it as an advantage altogether your own, and in which you only are interested; so that if it were recommended to you by no one, you ought still to embrace it of yourself, and with the utmost eagerness. For what interest can our Lord have in desiring you to live in poverty rather than in abundance of worldly goods? Or what advantage can accrue to Him from seeing you afflict your body instead of indulging it, or from your being despised instead of honoured by men? Most certainly nothing of all this

was any advantage to Him, so that you might suppose Him to have recommended it for His own sake. No; but He urged it so earnestly upon you, and endeavoured to induce you to accept it at such a cost to Himself, because loving you with more than a father's love, He saw all this to be requisite for the cure of that inordinate love of this world's goods, of which your soul was sick unto death. Therefore, just as a person afflicted with a dangerous abscess knows certainly that the surgeon who has ordered it to be cauterized is in no way affected either by his adopting or refusing that means of cure, but that the advantage in the one case, and the mischief in the other, concern himself only, and he never supposes that he is benefiting any one but himself by the use of the remedy; and this consideration alone, apart from every obligation or other extrinsic motive, is sufficient to induce him to employ it: so, in like manner, ought you not to suppose that our Lord enjoined on you these spiritual remedies for any advantage to Himself, or that you are doing Him any favour by using them, but to be convinced that it is you only who are concerned, and therefore, not to apply them willingly, as though He were compelling and driving you to do so for ends of His own, but with all your heart and strength, as one who of his own accord, chooses what is best for himself by his own free will.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

On some means of rendering it easier to live thus conformably to the doctrine and example of Christ.

SUMMARY.

I. One great means of making it easier, is to consider that the labour is short and the fruit eternal.

II. Another most efficacious means is to keep our eyes fixed upon our Lord, Who goes before us at every step.

III. The examples of the saints are also a great help in this matter who, although they were but men like ourselves, so generously followed in the footsteps of the Son of God.

IV. That which above all contributes to make this easier, is the spiritual consolation, far surpassing all human gratification, which our Lord is wont to bestow abundantly on those who are His true followers.

I. Consider that this way which our Lord points out to us, of always resisting our natural inclinations, although hard, rugged, difficult, and alarming to human weakness, because of the difficulties it presents at every step, has yet two advantages which greatly mitigate its roughness, that it will soon come to an end, and that it leads to an eternal rest; and to show the truth of this, tell me how long the toils and difficulties of this journey will last? How long will you have thus to mortify and humble yourself, to give up your own will, to shun what you like, and to follow what is naturally distasteful? For a very short time: no longer than the extent of your earthly life; and you know well how quickly it passes, how soon it is over. Ah, yes; however burdensome and difficult it seems now,

it will all be over in a few years, and will no more trouble you than if you had never endured it; and it will be immediately followed by a fulness of every good, a satisfaction of every desire, a state of the highest glory and most perfect blessedness, which will be enjoyed for ever. What is it, then, to do oneself a little violence, to meet with some difficulties, to overcome some repugnance, to bear some suffering and inconvenience for a few years? Let us be brave and take courage: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed to us."[1] Let us bear what we have to bear in the way of poverty, suffering, persecution, shame, and trouble for the very short space of this life, since afterwards we shall have all eternity to be rich, glorious, satisfied, and blessed beyond all that we can imagine or desire. All things have their appointed season: there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh;" the present life is not a time of feasting but of labour, not of reaping, but of sowing, not of possessing, but of earning happiness: and those who are willing to gain it now by temporary toil will one day enjoy it in the beauty and fulness of everlasting rest.

II. Consider that a most efficacious means of lightening all the difficulties of this way is the living memory and presence of our Lord, Who walks before us in it, crowned with thorns, laden with His heavy Cross, all bathed in blood, all covered with wounds. For, however austere may be your mortification, however deep your humiliation, you will never know such a depth of suffering and pain, of humiliation and insult as He endured in His Passion. And it would, therefore, be too unbecoming and disgraceful that while He, the Son of God and Lord of the universe, by no necessity of His own, but for your example and profit, offered His

[1] Romans viii. 18.

Body to sufferings so terrible and exposed His Heart to insults so abominable, you, His meanest servant, should be so fastidious and proud as to consider it an intolerable thing to suffer and to humble yourself so much less than He has done. Can you feel every little offence so keenly, when you see Him plunged for love of you in an abyss of the most enormous insults? Can you think every slight bodily pain so great, when you see Him torn with scourges, pierced with thorns, and agonizing on a Cross, in order to make Himself your pattern of perfect patience? Oh, if you have not lost all sense of what is right and due to your Divine Master, that sight ought to fill you with such courage that nothing would seem hard and difficult when He is with you: nay, you would be ashamed to take your ease and pleasure, while He is sweating Blood for you, just as every honourable soldier would be ashamed to be lying in bed in his tent while his general was bearing the brunt of an attack from the enemy, sword in hand. "Think diligently upon Him that endureth such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds. For you have not yet resisted unto blood."[2] Let me ask you whether if you had been there when Christ was carrying the Cross to Calvary, and being unable through weakness to bear so heavy a weight Himself, He had seen you and asked you in a plaintive voice to help Him by supporting it, if only with your hand or shoulder, what would you have done? What would you have answered? Would you have excused yourself and said: "I quite see, Lord, how this Cross is weighing You down. But You must have patience, and carry it as best You can by Yourself, for I am of too delicate constitution, and unaccustomed to so much labour?" I can see that you are shocked at the bare

[2] Hebrews xii. 3, 4.

mention of conduct so base. But I would have you know that is just what you do whenever you refuse to suffer together with Him. You compel Him, as far as you can, to carry His Cross alone and unassisted; you are not ashamed to spend your life in ease, pleasure, and amusement, whilst He is sweating, fainting, and falling for you. When, therefore, your nature rebels against the yoke of the Evangelical Counsels, and complains that they are too burdensome to be endured by it, turn your eyes upon the Son of God, your Captain and your Lord, and seeing Him bearing so cheerfully for your sake so tremendous a weight of sorrow and pain, be filled with confusion at fainting as you do under a cross of straw, and deem yourself unworthy of the name of a Christian if you are capable of thinking of your comfort, honour, or pleasure when you behold His surpassing shame and mortal anguish. "What! My Lord is hanging on the Cross, and shall I study my pleasure? There is no part of the Body of my Lord which is not cruelly wounded, and shall I be unwilling to bear the least suffering in any part of mine? He chose to be the scorn of men, and the reproach of the people, and shall I seek after applause and honour and deference? Oh, shameless, and hateful, and forgetful of every obligation shall I indeed be if I have the heart to act in such a manner! 'By thy welfare, and by the welfare of thy soul I will not do this thing.'"[8]

III. Consider the force of the examples of the saints in regard to the same object, for although they were weak men like ourselves, having the same nature and flesh, subject to the same passions and evil inclinations, they nevertheless overcame them so generously, shunning the things which are congenial to these appetites, and embracing the things which are hateful to

[8] 2 Kings xi. 11.

them. For, when we consider this, what excuse is left us for not living as they did? Do we say that we cannot do so? But why? If so many like ourselves, and many of them more delicately reared than we have been, many weaker in body, many more inclined to evil through bad habits, many hindered by greater opposition and difficulties have done this—"cannot you do what these men have done?" Certainly if they have so perfectly carried it out, it follows as a legitimate consequence that we can do the same, and if we can, what reason is there that we should not also be willing to do it? Do we not admire their generosity in thus humbling and mortifying themselves in imitation of Christ? Do we not envy them for it? Do we not call them blessed on these very grounds? Most certainly; and by so doing we declare that we consider it more praiseworthy, more desirable, and altogether better to live like them. Why, then, do not we, too, desire to be blessed? Why do we refuse what we acknowledge to be the best and most desirable? Why, seeing the wisdom of their resolution, and being able, as we are, to make a like one, are we careless and obstinate? Ask yourselves this question, every one of you, and see whether you can find any valid reason in answer to it. You cannot; and if you were to ponder over the matter for a hundred years you could not: for there is no such reason, and therefore you will be driven to the conclusion that whoever refuses to take so advantageous a resolution is foolish and unreasonable. Listen, then, to those noble heroes who seem to urge you by the voice of their example, and to cry to you from heaven: "Be bold and of good courage, comrade! Why do you hesitate to enter on this way along which we all walked, and so came to our final beatitude? Do not fear the difficult places which you will come to from time to time: we, too, passed through them: we,

too, endured this labour. But it was all over in a few years, and now, what consolation it has brought us to have persevered to the end in the way we entered on, in spite of all its hardness! Take heart, therefore, for all these difficulties, which so alarm you now, will come to an end as quickly for you, and then, when you find yourself perfectly victorious, and the conflict over, at peace, and at the end of your mortal pilgrimage, after all its restless agitation, in a word, in the full and unchangeable possession of your beatitude, oh, how you will bless God with us for having led you, through light and transient labours, to the eternal joy and rest of His kingdom of blessedness! 'We have rejoiced for the days in which Thou hast humbled us, for the years in which we have seen evils.'" [4]

IV. Consider that if there were no other means of alleviating the hardness of this way, the abundant refreshment of the Divine consolations which our Lord is wont to bestow on him who follows it, would suffice to diminish, nay, entirely to remove, its suffering. For He rains down upon him the sweetest manna, as upon the Israelites when journeying to the Promised Land, and feeds him with supernatural food, even as He fed those who followed Him in the desert place, "And they did all eat and were filled;" so that their hunger and need of refreshment ceased before that superabundant refreshment itself failed. Hear the witness of the great Doctor of the Gentiles, St. Paul. Who ever laboured and suffered more than he did in following the footsteps of Christ? Here is a list of some of his trials: "In many labours, in prisons frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often. Of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I was in the

[4] Psalm lxxxix. 15.

depth of the sea. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils from my own nation, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren, in labour and painfulness, in many watchings, in hunger and thirst, in many fastings, in cold and nakedness."[5] And yet we hear him declaring that in the midst of his tribulations his joy was, not full only, but overflowing: "I am filled with comfort; I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation."[6] What shall we say of that other apostle, the Apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier? For he, too, in extreme poverty, and want of all human help, in long journeys barefoot, now over scorching sand, now over hard ice, and now through thorny thickets, amidst dangers which lasted almost as long as his life, and thousands of labours beyond human powers of endurance, which pressed upon him day and night, enjoyed notwithstanding spiritual delights so abundant that, as though in fear of being consumed by their excess of fulness, he was heard crying to heaven: "It is enough, Lord, no more, no more!" Now this spiritual sweetness, so far beyond all natural delights, is experienced by every one more abundantly in proportion to the degree to which he practises mortification and self-conquest, in order to observe the Evangelical Counsels. For, as these delights have their source in love to God and the expectation of eternal beatitude, as the more a servant of God suffers for Him the more he pleases his Heavenly Master, and the greater reward He merits from Him in eternity, so it follows that the more he suffers the greater is his happiness. Convince yourself, therefore, as of a thing most certain, that by following Christ along the hard and narrow way of poverty, mortification, humility, and renunciation of your own

[5] 2 Cor. xi. 23—27. [6] 2 Cor. vii. 4.

will, you will have a far happier life than if, after the manner of imperfect Christians and religious, you sought as much as possible for your own honour and comfort, and for liberty to do as you please. And be very sure that by doing this you will be far happier than any man of the world, who, possessing abundant riches, pleasures, and honours, has no other object in view than to gratify his natural appetites whenever he has the opportunity. For if you once make your election to live entirely without these human gratifications, all their sweetness will be superabundantly compensated by a far purer and greater happiness, namely, by the certainty that you are thus pleasing God, and by the inestimable reward with which He will repay you. And these are things which surpass all human delights in sweetness to one who loves his Heavenly Master with all his heart, and knows how far the eternal possession of Him in heaven transcends every other good. Do not, then, be alarmed by the difficulties of this way, but be very sure that they will become, not bearable only, but sweet, by means of the joy and gladness which is commonly tasted by those who courageously overcome them.

SEVENTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the difference between serving God and serving the world.

SUMMARY.

I. The difference as regards the masters: because we know that God is most reasonable in His commands, most easy to please, most liberal in His promises, and most faithful in keeping them; and that none of these good conditions—nay, their very opposite—are to be met with in the world.

II. The difference as regards the servants: those who live under the rule of God being regular in their lives, modest, virtuous, cheerful, and peaceable: those who take the world for their master being without faith and justice, dissolute, disorderly, turbulent as a troop of wild beasts.

III. The necessity we are under of choosing one of these two masters, and the wisdom of preferring God to the world.

I. Consider how much better a master God is than the world. First, because His laws are beyond comparison more reasonable and easy than those of the world. For He does not require of any one who wishes to enter His service and to receive His pay, either expense so great, or labours so intolerable, or mortal dangers so manifest, voluntary, and continual, as those to which the servants of the world are compelled to submit every day in the acquisition of pleasure, wealth, and honour. Secondly, because He never requires anything of His servants without, at the same time,

giving them the aids and means requisite for accomplishing it, whereas the world, while requiring its servants to labour beyond their strength, and to expose themselves to the extremity of danger in making themselves rich or prominent, and in gratifying their sensual appetites, supplies them neither with the necessary strength for enduring those labours, nor with assistance requisite for a safe issue from those dangers. Many in consequence sink under their burden before having executed these severe orders, some losing their health, others their very lives; some falling in battle or in duels while pursuing vain phantoms of honour; others killed by rivals while seduced by the insidious allurements of forbidden pleasures; others, again, lost at sea whilst aiming at gaining riches in foreign countries. Thirdly, because our Heavenly Master, having no need of our service, does not require from us, as a condition of serving Him perfectly, more than we are able to do at the time, whether that be much or little or nothing, but, when either strength or ability to do Him service are wanting, is satisfied with the sincere desire only, which He accounts as meritorious as if it had also issued in action. It is far otherwise with the world, which is scarcely ever satisfied, or rewards its servants according to their good intention, no matter how willingly or laboriously they endeavour to please it. We see signal instances of this in those who spend their lives, either in the service of princes, or in labouring greatly to win the approval and good opinion of men. There are few indeed of the number who, instead of the praise and honour they expected, have not found disgust and depreciation. Fourthly, because God, with a liberality worthy of so great a King, promises no less a recompense for our poor and momentary services than an everlasting and perfect beatitude; whereas the promises of the world, which

has so little and can do so little, are limited to things which, besides being very short-lived, are either low, base, and animal, such as the pleasures of the senses, or external to man, like riches and honours. And even of these rewards, paltry as they are, it gives but an uncertain and doubtful hope to any one. Fifthly, and lastly, because God is no less faithful in bestowing than liberal in promising His heavenly recompense; for never was there any one who, after having served Him, was not rewarded beyond his expectations. While, on the contrary, for one servant of the world who obtains the recompense of the wealth, pleasure, or honour which was his object, there are countless numbers left empty-handed in their original poverty, misery, and low estate; neither is there a spot on earth where multitudes are not to be found complaining bitterly that they have spent their life's labour in serving it without any profit.

II. Consider how far fairer and more desirable is the life which is led by God's servants than by the courtiers and vassals of the world. What human society is there to be found on earth better regulated, calmer, and happier than the former? There are amongst them no rivalries, enmities, quarrels, frauds, or injustice. No one tries to cheat his neighbour, or to aggrandize himself to the detriment of another. They love all men—they strive to do good to all; their intercourse is one of friendly and brotherly harmony with all; their thoughts are only of heavenly things, their only aim is continually to advance in virtue. The serenity of their faces reflects the peace of their conscience and the good order of their affections. Their hope of eternal goods makes them desirous of nothing earthly, contented with what they have, however little it may be, and with bare necessaries they think themselves rich. Prosperity is not able to

inflate them with proud satisfaction, nor adversity to depress them with vain sadness; but in both they recognize, and praise with tranquil resignation the will of their Heavenly Master. You will find them merry without levity, calm without sloth, busy without anxiety, temperate in food, sincere in speech, enemies of all duplicity and self-interest, full of meekness and charity, studying nothing but what is right, just, becoming and modest. What do you think of this life? Would it not be a state of happiness, a real golden age, if all men led such a one? And what of the second class, the servants of the world? Do they live this sort of life? Nay, rather one that is the reverse, the very antipodes of so happy a hemisphere. What confusion, what discord, what abominations we see in their behaviour and morals! Look at them as they grovel on the earth: day and night plunged in the thought of low interests, perpetually agitated, now by immoderate desires, now by restless anxieties, now by furious anger, now by despairing melancholy, some wasting away in the corruption of animal enjoyments, others consumed with an insatiable desire of honours and riches; one man plotting secret vengeance, others fighting with drawn swords. There is no law too holy, no friendship too old, no kinship too close for them to dread infringing, when to do so will forward their worldly schemes. Their only wisdom is the knowledge of deception, of scheming, and of duping others. Under a smiling face they hide a heart full of bitterness. Under promises of service they hatch treason. They praise you to your face and laugh at you behind your back. They are, in short, men without faith and conscience, without reverence for God, or charity to their neighbour; and if the life of the former class is an image of an earthly Paradise, the behaviour of these latter is a sort of reflection of hell.

III. Consider that you must of necessity be enrolled under one of these two masters, and in one of these two classes, and that all that is open to you is to choose, at your pleasure, one or other; for being, as they are, opposed in every respect, it is not possible to combine them in your choice, and so to serve both the world and God. Come then, and make your election. Which of these two masters, think you, best merits your service, and will treat you the best? Which of the two offers you the most contented and the happiest life in his court and among his followers? My God! is it a matter to be questioned, to seek advice about, to hesitate over even for a single moment? Let us suppose that it was proposed to you to take service with two earthly princes, one of whom was very reasonable and easily pleased, and very liberal in payment, and the other unreasonable, hard to satisfy, apt to drive a hard bargain, and generally faithless as to paying the salary he has promised, should you have any hesitation in deciding which to serve? Certainly not. You would at once determine that the former was to be preferred by every one in his senses. If, then, it is quite evident that the former represents God and the latter the world, what doubt is there that if you would make a reasonable choice you must prefer the service of God to that of the world? And, apart from the consideration of the masters, the difference which we have observed between the lives of the slaves of the world and the servants and followers of God would be enough to make you decide on this choice; the latter being in accordance with the dictates of reason, the requirements of justice, and the usages of human society, right, becoming, quiet, full of solid, true, and lasting pleasure, and the former opposed to every law, human and Divine, natural and political, unbridled, turbulent, vicious, and brutish. Who, therefore, could

consider the former without approbation and pleasure, without loving it, and feeling sweetly attracted to follow it? or contemplate the latter without sentiments of detestation, disgust, and horror? So that, if you have a spark of reason and of love for yourself, you will indignantly reject the treacherous invitation of the world, under whose tyranny your life would be so burdened with labour, so poor in rewards, so hideous through vice, so wearisome with agitation, disturbance, and sadness, and you will henceforward devote yourself to the perpetual service of the Sovereign Lord of the universe, Whose rule is rather that of a father than of a master, Whose rewards incomparably transcend our deserts, Whose laws have no object but the advantage of His subjects, and to serve Whom is the same thing as to live aright, and like a reasonable man—nay, rather to be raised above the original state of man, so as to anticipate here on earth that final beatitude for which we were created, and which, therefore, is enjoyed more perfectly by those who possess it in heaven, because the service which they render there to God is more perfect also. Happy will you be if you make so wise a choice. What happiness will it bring you! How sweet will be the fruit which you will at once begin to reap! And how will you feel that you are thus born again into a better, nay, into the only true life! O yes!—"Return, and you shall see the difference between the just and the wicked; and between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not."[1]

[1] Malach. iii. 18.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the life which our Lord led up to the time of His Passion.

SUMMARY.

I. It was very poor, and full of privation and suffering.
II. It was very lowly, and devoid of all honour.
III. It was full of zeal and care to advance the glory of God.
IV. It was spent in relieving and doing good to all men.

I. Consider how very poor and hard was the life which the Incarnate Word of God led in the world for three and thirty years. Contemplate Him born in a mean stable for want of a better lodging, and having no cradle to be laid in at His birth but the straw of a manger; then, as He grew older, having no means of livelihood save what He procured by the daily labour of His hands. How can we reckon the discomforts and privations which attend upon so extreme a poverty? How many must He have endured in the flight into Egypt, which was begun by night, without any time for making the necessary preparations for so long a journey! How many, during the whole of His sojourn as an exile in that foreign and barbarous country! How many, after the return to Nazareth, in St. Joseph's poor workshop! How many during those forty days He passed in the desert, without any food to restore His strength, without a dwelling in which to take shelter from the rains and wind and the cold night air, without a bed whereon to rest His limbs in needful sleep! How many during the last three years of His life, in His journeyings through the countries of Judæa,

when He had not where to lay His head! Not to speak of those nine months from the Conception to the Nativity, which He spent imprisoned and motionless in His Mother's womb—a confinement most painful to one having, as He had, the use of reason, by means of which He was sensible of its rigour. Thus poor, thus devoid of all comfort, and in continual suffering, did the Son of God, the Lord of the universe, choose to live amongst us—He Who has dominion over all the treasures of land and sea, and of Whose infinite riches the possessions of all the kings of the earth are no more than a tiny drop. What a shame to us, His meanest servants and worms of earth, who are never satisfied with heaping up wealth, who cannot endure the want of anything, who complain of every little inconvenience, who desire to live surrounded by every comfort, plenty, and magnificence! Surely mere reason requires us not to claim to surpass our Master in the goods we possess and the conveniences we enjoy, for it is a most true saying that "the disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."[1] And if we have not the courage to imitate Him fully in enduring the same want and suffering, at least let us be ashamed of being entirely unlike Him in this, and so let us observe some degree of moderation in the enjoyment of all those pleasures which He refused altogether, and be willing from time to time to experience some effects of that poverty in which He passed His whole life.

II. Consider how throughout His life He showed His love of humility and His avoidance of worldly honour, choosing for His birthplace a mean stable of animals, submitting to circumcision, which was a remedy for sin, and thereby seeming guilty of it, when

[1] St. Mark x. 24, 25.

He was innocence itself; fleeing by night from the fury of Herod as a helpless Infant, unable to escape it by open resistance; living till the age of thirty confined to a workshop, and employed in manual labour; He, Who was the Lord of the world, stooping His Head in the Jordan to the Baptism of St. John like the rest of the crowd; choosing obscure fishermen for His daily companions; forbidding those whom He healed to spread the tidings of their miraculous cure; enduring to be called one possessed by a devil, a sorcerer, a destroyer of the law of Moses; hiding Himself from the multitude when they wanted to make Him a King, after the miraculous multiplying of the loaves in the desert; and at the Last Supper, kneeling to wash with His hands the soiled feet, not only of the other disciples, but of the detestable traitor Judas. Consider, I say, how He, the King of Glory, and a Person of Infinite Majesty, thus marvellously abased Himself; and then consider whether it is becoming that you, His disciple and follower, should, on the contrary, always choose the noblest abodes and occupations, stand upon your dignity, carefully avoid every shadow and semblance of humiliation, consider it an act of weakness to give way to one who does you an injury, instead of meeting violence with violence; resent every little depreciating word so keenly, disdain to converse with any but persons of consideration, and make it your chief concern to display your talents and virtues, and whatever may win for you the esteem of men. Oh, these are not the feelings and behaviour befitting one who worships a God Who came from heaven to earth in order to be a Teacher and Model of perfect humility, and Who declared this virtue to be the one which He would have us especially learn of Him. "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of Heart."[2] And again, after

[2] St. Matt. xi. 29.

giving us so bright an example of it in washing the feet of the Apostles, He would have them learn thence how right it was that they should imitate Him in this: "You call Me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If, then, I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also."[3] Be, then, deaf no longer to lessons so important, but turning to your Divine Master, say to Him: "Your example, Lord, is the most forcible of arguments; it proves convincingly that when You have so abased Yourself, and taken the form of a servant, none of Your servants has a right to walk proudly, and act the master. I cannot deny, I cannot resist the force of the conclusion. Henceforth, therefore, vanity, ambition, and the desire of a great name among men, shall not carry me away as they have hitherto done. Let who will seek for praise, dignity, and high position in the world: I will hold it far above all earthly glory and state, to humble and abase myself, to lead a lowly and a hidden life with You."

III. Consider with what zeal and diligence He laboured to perform the will and to advance the glory of His Eternal Father. This was the end for which He declared that He came into the world: "I came down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."[4] This was the business to which He gave Himself with all His mind and strength from His childhood, so that He replied to His Blessed Mother, who had been seeking Him for long outside the Temple, "How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"[5] This was the occupation which made Him forget even to take needful food, and by which He

[3] St. John xiii. 13—15. [4] St. John vi. 38. [5] St. Luke ii. 49.

thought Himself sufficiently refreshed and nourished. So that when the Apostles pressed Him to eat, He declared: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me."[6] To this object He sacrificed His strongest affections and the keenest feelings of His natural inclination, for when He was reduced by their extreme vehemence to a mortal anguish and a Sweat of Blood in the Garden of Gethsemani, He was not hindered by that terrible Agony from offering Himself with the most perfect submission to the decrees of His Father; nay, so determined was He to execute them, in spite of all their severity, and the repugnance of His senses, that He esteemed it a strange and impossible thing to suppose the contrary, and broke forth, to him who sought to withhold Him from doing so, into that expression of wonder: "The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"[7] Lastly, this was the principal, nay, the only aim on which His eyes were always fixed, to which all His thoughts and care and labours were directed, sparing no toil, no fatigue, by means of which He might extend the Kingdom of His Heavenly Father on earth, and never deterred from attracting souls to His service, from spreading His worship, from checking offences against Him, by respect for any one soever, or from fear of any danger to Himself. For instance, with what boldness and superhuman authority He faced alone a great multitude of traffickers, who were profaning the Temple by their greedy pursuit of gain, overturned their seats, scattered their merchandise on all sides, and with lashes of a scourge drove them terrified from the sacred place; and how often, again, did He publicly scourge the pride of the Pharisees with zealous words of cutting reproof, though He saw clearly that they had conceived the most violent hatred against Him, and were

[6] St. John iv. 34. [7] St. John xviii. 11.

persecuting Him incessantly and in every way, even to the death. O incomparable Son! all zeal, energy, and fire in the interests of His Eternal Father, and most worthy of receiving from Him in return that public testimony: "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."[8] Is this your way of acting, or do you not rather desist from accomplishing the will of God through any trivial difficulty, abandon His cause, refuse to oppose those who offend Him, hesitate to declare openly that you are His servant from some paltry feeling of human respect? Examine yourself a little, and learn that real love for Him does not consist in mere words and barren sentiments, but in doing His will and labouring for His glory.

III. Consider also how diligent He was in doing good to men in every possible way, and in relieving all their wants, whether of soul or of body; how manifold was His manner of pouring His charity on persons of all conditions, but especially on those who were most mean and poor and abject; how tenderly He not only consoled and succoured all who had recourse to Him, but went in search of those who were in need, that He might relieve and help them. Never did any calumny or blame of His envious enemies cause Him to cease either from conversing familiarly with sinners in order to convert them, or from healing the sick on any day, no matter how holy; and in what words of tenderness has He Himself described to us His ardent love of souls, likening it now to the eagerness of a hen in protecting her chickens: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings!"[9] Now to the care of a loving shepherd in defending his sheep: "I am the Good Shepherd, Who giveth His life for His sheep."[10] In a word, His whole life during

[8] St. Matt. xvii. 5. [9] St. Matt. xxiii. 37. [10] St. John x. 11.

those last three years was like the continual revolution of an unwearied and beneficent sun round the villages and cities of Judæa, shedding, wherever He went, heavenly streams of life and salvation; as St. Matthew writes: "He went about all the cities and towns, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity."[11] What do you think of a charity so disinterested, so universal, so loving and energetic and unwearied and prompt? And the very same is what He requires of you, for He says: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."[12] Try to copy it in yourself, by loving all, helping all, endeavouring to do good to all, labouring to the utmost for the profit, both spiritual and temporal, of all. Happy will you be if you do so: there is no surer means of drawing on yourself the mercy of God, which is the source of every good which you can desire or hope for. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."[13]

[11] St. Matt. ix. 35.

[12] St. John xv. 12. [13] St. Matt. v. 7.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the outrages, mockeries, and insults which our Lord chose to suffer in His Passion, in order to give us an example of perfect humility, and thus to extinguish our inordinate love of the esteem of men.

SUMMARY.

I. The injury done to Him by Judas in betraying Him.
II. The enormous outrages He endured in the house of Caiphas.
III. The calumnies alleged against Him before Pilate.
IV. His being treated and mocked as a fool at the Court of Herod.
V. The insult of Barabbas being preferred to Him.
VI. The contumely and cruelty with which He was insulted as a mock king in the Prætorium.
VII. The unjust and fierce hatred of the people in demanding with furious cries that He should be crucified.
VIII. The bitter insults uttered against Him while dying in agony on the Cross.

I. Consider how grievous was the wrong done to our Lord by Judas. For after being chosen an Apostle, and so lovingly treated by Him, he sold Him for a few pieces of money to His enemies, and putting himself at the head of the band collected to seize Him, had the audacity to come forward to salute and kiss Him in the very act of betraying Him. An audacity which cannot be thought of without indignation, and which would have met with its deserts if his betrayed Master had driven him from His presence with an angry countenance, saying, " Monster of perfidy, do you dare to appear before Me after so base an action? Away from my sight! Go and hide yourself where there is

no one who knows you, and who can recognize you for the wretch that you are." Surely such reproaches were justly due to that guilty man. But our Lord, instead of thus repulsing him, met him with a gentle countenance, called him by the name of friend, endured his traitorous kiss, which He returned by another full of kindness and peace. What a great example and lesson to us, who, if any one has, not betrayed, but given us some slight offence, can no longer regard him with good will, nor say a kind word to him, nor be reconciled to him, till we have given vent to our interior anger by some outward expression of resentment. Let us be ashamed of being so different to our Heavenly Master, and rather endeavour, as far as possible, to imitate His meekness, or cease to profess ourselves His followers and disciples.

II. Consider the sufferings of our Lord after His apprehension in the Garden, in the house of Caiphas, where He was declared by him to be a blasphemer, and where the whole Council cried out, "He is guilty of death;" as though by those words giving every one liberty to do their worst to Him. And then guards, servants, and others of the lowest rabble there present, surrounded Him, and loaded Him with as many and as frightful insults as their devilish fury suggested. For first they vied with each other in covering His face with the foulest and most disgusting spittle, so that that countenance, which was before so venerable, was disfigured, and covered all over with abominable defilement. And, not satisfied with this, they bandaged His eyes with a dirty rag, and first one, then another, buffeted Him, bidding Him, by way of jeering at His prophecies, guess who had struck Him. And He, throughout all these terrible insults, never lost His tranquillity in the least degree, never changed His position to avoid them, never uttered one word of com-

plaint, nor seemed to feel them any more than a statue, a stock, or a stone. Thus did He fulfil what was written of Him: "He shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer. He shall give His cheek to him that striketh Him. He shall be filled with reproaches. I do not resist, I have not gone back. I have given My body to the strikers, and My cheeks to them that plucked them: I have not turned away My face from them that rebuked Me and spit upon Me."[1] How was it possible for the Sovereign Lord of the universe, the King of infinite greatness, power, and majesty, to abase Himself more, to be steeped in a deeper abyss of humiliation? What must the angels have said at seeing their King made the common sport of that low mob, "the reproach of men and the outcast of the people?" Nay, rather, what should, what can I say, who at every paltry affront, every little trifling word of blame, fire up, put myself in a passion, am filled with indignation, and cannot be pacified till I have revenged myself? And what am I after all? An insignificant person of no value, a vile worm of earth; and, which is much more, a sinner, meriting hell; that is, meriting to endure through all eternity far different mockeries, injuries, and ill-usage from those which make me so angry on earth. Oh, shall I not learn at last from the unheard of humility and patience of my Lord amidst insults so enormous, to feel less resentment at such ordinary and trivial ones as I have to bear? Oh, if I loved Him as His saints and true servants did, so far from being the least grieved at them, I should be ashamed of being respected when I see Him so contemned; and no earthly glory would be to me so dear as to resemble Him by a participation of His shame.

III. Consider how, after all these insults which were offered Him in the High Priest's house, He was taken

[1] Isaias liii. 7; Lam. iii. 30; Isaias l. 5, 6.

next morning with great violence and tumult to Pilate's tribunal, where, in defiance of all truth and justice, He was accused of stirring up the people to sedition, of seeking to be regarded as a King, and of forbidding the payment of tribute to the Emperor. And this, surely, was a serious wrong enough to rouse meekness itself, for there is nothing more grievous to a man of honour and reputation than to be charged, through the malevolence of others, with faults the enormity of which makes them utterly foreign to him, all the more when the calumny, besides blackening his character, imperils his life. But how did our Lord act under these circumstances? Did He complain of being thus wrongly accused? Did He call witnesses and adduce proofs of His innocence? Nothing of the sort. "He answered not to any word," is the testimony of St. Matthew.[2] As though He had either no ears to hear, or no tongue to refute accusations, He kept silence, calm, perpetual, and unbroken, through all the fierce howlings of His traducers, which deafened the air, and the encouraging invitation of the Roman Governor who urged Him to defend Himself, saying, "Dost not Thou hear how great testimonies they allege against Thee?" so that "the Governor wondered exceedingly." And yet there are to be found persons, religious even, and men professing to lead a spiritual life, who, when they are accused of any fault, even a slight and common one, continually torment themselves and others with complaints, justifications, and explanations, as though a world in which they are thought to blame must be coming to an end. Let such men learn from this example if not to endure silently and without seeking to exculpate themselves, calumnies which involve serious disgrace, at least not to make so much ado about those which hardly affect their character.

[2] St. Matthew xxvii. 14.

For it is no great harm if some little failing is, even falsely believed of one who has really committed many grievous faults which are not known, But, above all, let them learn not to desire to excuse themselves when they are truly guilty, for it is utterly contrary to Christian humility to reject all shame, even when it is merited, and to claim from men greater credit than we have from God.

IV. Consider how, when our Lord was sent by the Roman Governor to Herod, the latter, although at first He received Him graciously, in order to induce Him to work some miracle to please him, yet when he saw that He gave no reply to any of his questions, considered Him mad, and turning to the officers who had brought Him, said, "A fine present, certainly, Pilate has sent me in this silly, senseless fellow, without speech or sense. Dress Him according to His character, and send Him back with all the state due to His crazy condition." And as he said, so it was done by the bystanders, who laughed and jeered at our Lord till their insolence was satisfied, and then had Him sent back to Pilate through Jerusalem, in charge of the officers, clothed in a robe of scorn, and followed by the hooting rabble, who abused Him, jostled Him this way and that, and threw filth upon Him. That is the esteem in which the Eternal Wisdom of God chose to be held by the world—to be considered stupid, senseless, and a fool! And we, on the contrary, desire to be esteemed by all wise, prudent, and men of great intellect, to have our advice asked, and received with applause, and to have all our answers treated like oracles! Ah, let us blush for this pride and vainglory of ours, seeing the Eternal Word thus deeply humiliated.

V. Consider how, since it was the Jewish custom to release a prisoner chosen by the people on the day of the Pasch, Pilate, in order at the same time to deliver

Christ from death, and himself escape the infamy of condemning an innocent man, proposed for the choice of the people our Lord and a certain Barabbas, a thief, rioter, and murderer, and they with one voice cried out that they would deliver Barabbas, not Christ. Who does not see that in this strange preference of so vile a criminal to Him Who, even if He had not been the Messias and the Son of God, had shed, so to say, a brightness as of the sun through all Judæa by the innocency of His life, the reputation of His teaching, and the splendour of His miracles, a great indignity was done to our Lord? What a manifestation, then, was it of His equanimity, to endure this without the least interior or exterior perturbation! And who, too, does not see what force this example should have in silencing the complainings of our natural sensibility, whenever we are hurt at being less highly esteemed and considered than some one inferior to us in talent or merit? For even supposing this to be true, and not, as is frequently the case, the false suggestion of our self-love, it is very certain that our superiority to the person who is preferred to us cannot possibly be as great as was that of our Lord to Barabbas. If, then, He freely consented to be declared inferior to one whom He immeasurably surpassed, and that when it was a question not of any ordinary good, but of that which is the most important of all human goods, namely, life; it is easy to draw the conclusion that it is reasonable for us to bear willingly being now and then made second to persons not so far beneath us, and in matters less important.

VI. Consider how the insults which our Lord had suffered in the house of Caiphas were repeated in the Prætorium. For, as there He had been mocked as a false prophet, so here He is mocked as a false and sham King; they put a purple rag over His shoulders, a

reed, for a sceptre, in His hand, and a crown of thorns on His head, and so bend their knees before Him as in worship. But soon the scene of mock reverence is changed, and they proceed to open ill-usage, buffeting and spitting on Him, and taking the reed out of His hand, they smite Him with it on the head, so that the thorns with which He is crowned may pierce it more deeply. Once more admire the patience and humility of Christ in allowing Himself to be so vilely insulted by those wicked men, as the very scorn of men, whom every one was at liberty to outrage as he pleased, and gather from this how contrary it is to all that is right, that while He is standing there "like a lamb before his shearer," calm, silent, and motionless amidst such excessive injuries, you should be unable to bear the slightest wrong without serious resentment and expressions of anger. My God, what reasoning will suffice to inculcate meekness, humility and patience, if this singular and admirable example fails in doing so?

VII. Consider the extreme injustice and cruelty of the almost incredible hatred manifested towards our Lord by the Jews, when, after the scourging and crowning with thorns, Pilate, in order to arouse some feeling of pity in their barbarous hearts, brought Him forth before them all torn, bleeding, and covered with wounds. For, far from being softened at the sight of an innocent Man so ill-used and injured, One too, Who for three years had gone about their country "doing good and healing all men," they all shouted, "Crucify Him, crucify Him," with unheard of fury and hatred. "It is not enough all that He has suffered: away with Him to death, to the Cross!" But if this barbarity of theirs was marvellous beyond measure, still more marvellous beyond measure, was the unshaken constancy and gentleness of our Blessed Lord in enduring it.

Surely every one must feel how deeply an unjust and unreasonable hatred wounds the heart, and what heroic patience is required to bear it well, especially when those who hate us are the very persons most bound to love us for the services we have done them, yet who are not even satisfied with hating, us, but strive to distress and injure us, and to do us all the harm they can whenever they have the opportunity. It is true that such wickedness is very rare amongst men, being contrary to all natural feelings of humanity, nay, even of brute beasts, so that very likely you never have had and never will have to suffer such a trial; but it may easily happen that some one to whom you have freely done a kindness, repays you, not indeed with violent and mortal hatred, but with some injustice or bad turn. In such a case, which likewise requires a more than ordinary degree of virtue, it will be a very great help to you to reflect on the wonderful charity which the Son of God continued to cherish for the Jewish people, even when, after all the manifestations He had given them of special affection, and thousands of miracles wrought in their behalf, He saw them so infuriated against Him, so thirsty for His Blood, and so eager for His condemnation, that all the terrible anguish and torment He had endured was not enough to satisfy them, till they had inflicted on Him the last of all, and taken His life. Oh, incomparable charity, not to be conquered by all the blasts and floods of men's wickedness, and able to render equally victorious those who well consider it! Well may we repeat with the Apostle, "Think diligently upon Him Who endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds."[3]

VIII. Consider the meekness and charity displayed by our Lord before He expired on the Cross toward

[3] Heb. xii. 3.

those who, not satisfied with seeing Him nailed in agony to that tree of shame, increased the affliction of Him already so grievously afflicted by their mockeries and insults, reproaching Him with being unable to deliver Himself from death, and concluding, therefore, that the miracles He had wrought on behalf of others were false, and that He had falsely claimed to be the Son of God: "they blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, Vah, Thou that destroyest the Temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it, save Thy own Self; if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross. . . . He saved others, Himself He cannot save; if He be the King of Israel let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him."[4] Is not this a barbarity never exercised even towards the worst malefactors? Does not every one possessing a feeling of humanity pity them in that final act of suffering, and satisfied with seeing them punished, leave them to die in peace instead of wishing them to become their executioner, and to increase their torment by bitter mockeries? But these insults, pitiless and unheard of as they were, so that they would have shaken the constancy of any other heart, had no power at all to arouse a feeling of vengeance in the mind, or to exort a word of complaint from the lips of our dying Lord. Nay, in the torments of His last agony, which then oppressed Him with redoubled force, He seemed, as it were, to forget Himself while thinking of shielding that brutal people from His Father's anger, by renewing on behalf of those who were mocking Him the intercession He had already made for those who crucified Him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—thus by His example setting the seal to that rule of perfect charity which He had already taught in His Gospel, that is to say, a charity which

[4] St. Matt. xxvii. 39, 40, 42.

not only forbids us to hate, but urges us positively to love those who hate us, which not only prohibits injuring those who ill-use us, but would have us do them all possible good: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you."[5]

[5] St. Luke vi. 27, 28.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

On the torments and pains endured by the Son of God in His Passion in order to give us an example of perfect mortification, and so to correct our inordinate love for our bodies.

SUMMARY.

I. The blows and buffets He received in His face.
II. The scourging.
III. The crowning with thorns.
IV. The Crucifixion.
V. The end our Lord had in view in enduring these terrible sufferings, namely, to induce us to love our bodies less tenderly, and to cherish them less daintily.

I. Consider the pains which our Lord endured from the blows and buffets He received on His most sacred face, which are recorded to have been more than a hundred and thirty. And this is easily credible, when we consider the expressions used by the holy Evangelists SS. Mark and John in speaking of the buffets given to Him, first during the night of His apprehension by the Jews in the house of Caiphas, and then on the following day by the soldiers in Pilate's Prætorium, concerning the first of which it is said, "alapis eum cædebant," and of the latter "dabant ei alapas," and these verbs, being in the imperfect tense, signify a continuous succession of blows. There were many persons in both places who struck Him, and as they had time to do so as often as their malevolence suggested, the number of the blows must have been very great

indeed. I leave it, then, to you to think how horrible and pitiful must have been the disfigurement of that most beautiful face from that fearful hailstorm of blows showered upon it furiously, recklessly, and mercilessly by men who, partly from disposition and habits, partly from hatred and malignity, were cruel and inhuman as wild beasts. Think how His head must have been dizzy, His eyes bruised, His jaws aching, His teeth loosened, His mouth full of blood, His cheeks livid and swollen—in a word, how utterly deformed and disfigured, how changed from His natural appearance must He have been Who was, so short a time ago, "beautiful among all the sons of men." Ah, me! "there is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness" (they are the words of Isaias contemplating Him so many ages before), "and we have seen Him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of Him: despised, and the most abject of men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity, and His look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not."[1]

II. Consider the torment of the scourging, which was most intense, both from the straining of nearly all the limbs of the body, and from the nature of the scourges, some of which are said to have been iron hooks and chains, and also from the fury of the executioners, who, at the instigation of the elders of the synagogue, dealt their blows as violently as if they were striking the ground and were relieved when weary by others who were in full strength; also from the length of time, which was an hour and a half, and the number of stripes, which was six thousand, and, lastly, from the delicacy of our Lord's Body, which being miraculously and most perfectly formed, could not but be more perfectly endowed than other bodies with the sense of touch, that is to say, more sensitive to every

[1] Isaias liii. 2, 3.

pain. So that from these considerations it is easy for every one to gather what fearful torture He must have endured from that storm of stripes which rained down upon those beautiful and tender limbs, a storm so furious that it could not have been borne by the wildest and fiercest beasts, for all the thickness and coarseness of their hides; think how the skin was violently torn, how the flesh was rent and cut to pieces, how in many places the bones were laid bare, and what copious rivers of blood flowed from the veins. Such, in short, was that torture, and so maimed was our Lord's Body that "from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there was no soundness in Him—but wounds and bruises and swelling sores . . . we thought Him as it were a leper." Is not this a butchery such as would be witnessed with horror if the subject of it were a murderer or even a dog? And it is the Son of God Who endured it! Picture yourself as present in the Prætorium when the executioners were engaged in their terrible work; and consider on the one hand what your sensations, your struggles and writhings and groans and terror would have been, if you had been the victim, and on the other admire the unshaken soul, the courage, constancy, and calmness with which our Lord so willingly endured this torment for love of you, like an anvil under the blows of the hammer, if we may use the expression, without once shrinking from fear of the blows, or showing a sign of preturbation, or uttering a cry of pain.

III. Consider the crowning with thorns, a torment till now unheard of, and practised for the first time by the barbarous caprice of the executioners on our Lord, Who was as covetous of suffering as men in their sensuality are of pleasure, for as they are always devising new ways of enjoyment, He, on the contrary, chose that new instruments of cruelty should be invented for

His torment. And what torment was this! For the seat of suffering was the temples of our Lord, a part of the body full of nerves and very sensitive to the slightest puncture, and the thorns were exceedingly numerous, and so long and sharp that some of them went down to the eyebrows, and others, piercing the skull, penetrated the brain. So that that most Sacred Head was externally like a thicket bristling with thorns and interiorly resembled a sieve, full of holes, and the blood trickling in streams from all those wounds, matted the hair together, and covered the neck and face in a manner most terrible to witness. His own Virgin Mother herself revealed to St. Bridget that "He appeared nothing but a mass of blood from the many streams of it that flowed down His face, and filled His hair and eyes and beard." And if we cannot rest for the pain caused by one single thorn which has buried itself in the sole of our foot, what must have been the agony which our Lord endured from so many which so deeply penetrated His temples and forehead and skull, even to the very brain.

IV. Consider the multitude of our Lord's sufferings after His condemnation to be crucified: first, the carrying of the Cross to Calvary on those shoulders torn by the scourges, for it could not but be that His wounds were made wider, deeper, and sharper at every step from that heavy load resting on them. Besides this, our Lord was so greatly weakened by His previous sufferings, and by the quantity of blood He had lost, that he was hardly able to support the weight of His own Body, still less of that immense burden. Then as the brutality of the executioners forced Him to walk faster, how many times must He have stumbled and sunk on His knees, and fallen prostrate on the earth! How greatly must the pain of His wounds have been increased every time that He

fell, with the Cross, too, falling upon Him! Secondly, remember the stripping of His garments before the Crucifixion, how they must have adhered in many parts to the torn flesh from the coagulation of the blood, and being roughly torn off by the executioners, brought away with them the thin covering to which they clung, opening the wounds afresh, and causing acute pain, and an abundant flow of blood. Thirdly, His Hands and Feet were fastened to the Cross by heavy blows of the hammer on the sharp and cruel nails; and those, too, are parts of the body which are intensely sensitive from the number of veins, arteries, and nerves which meet there. And the pain was increased by the shrinking of the nerves of the hand which was first nailed to the Cross, so that it was necessary to drag the other violently by ropes, and it was strained and pulled before it could be made to reach the hole prepared for it on the other side of the Cross, and this must have caused most agonizing convulsions of the breast, tearing of the veins, and dislocation of the bones. Fourthly, think of those last three hours of life, or, to speak more truly, of lingering death, on the Cross. For if every dying person is so troubled and agitated and oppressed in his last agony, even when lying on a soft bed, and supplied with everything he wants for his help or relief, and only suffering from some natural and common sickness, who shall say what was that terrible agony which our Lord endured in the midst of the mortal anguish and pain of a body torn, pierced, and wounded from head to foot, without a single consolation, or refreshment, or help, or support, stretched not on a bed, nay, not even on the bare earth, where at least there would have been some rest for His dying limbs, but hanging in mid air, unsupported save by the nails which transfixed His Hands and Feet, and resting only on them by the wounds

which were being continually made wider and more painful by the unspeakable torture of the weight of all His Body pressing on them.

V. Consider that no single one of these many and terrible torments was endured by the Son of God by compulsion, or against His will, or because He could not avoid it, but that each and all, before they were inflicted by His enemies, were voluntarily appointed and chosen by Him; and that, not because nothing less would have sufficed for the redemption of mankind, since it is most certain that by reason of the infinite value of His actions, one single drop of blood, one single tear shed by Him, would have been more than enough, but in order that men, naturally so eager after pleasure and indulgence, seeing Him submit of His own free choice to these fearful sufferings, might learn hence to mortify their bodies, and to entertain for them that holy hatred without which no one has a true love for himself. In order, then, to gather this fruit for yourself, spend some short time in contemplating your crucified Saviour from head to foot, and when you have gazed upon His most sacred head, pierced all round with sharp thorns, His face frightfully swollen, livid, and disfigured by the blows inflicted on Him by sacrilegious hands, His neck, arms, shoulders, breast and legs torn and wounded by scourges, His hands and feet pierced by cruel nails, turn your eyes upon yourself, and note the difference between you and Him. He is exceedingly tormented and afflicted in every part of His Body, you take great care not to feel the slightest pain in any part of yours; He is crowned with thorns, and you with roses; He cannot be satiated with torments, and you are always greedy after fresh pleasures; He is all one wound, you are all given to indulgence. And yet He is the Master, you are the servant; He is the Creator of the universe, you are His meanest crea-

ture; He is a God of infinite greatness and majesty, you are a vile and miserable man; He is the Holy of Holies, you are an enormous sinner, meriting by your sins everlasting punishment. It will be very easy, last of all, to draw the conclusion that your delicacy is base, shameful, disgraceful, and a thing to be corrected at any cost, when you contrast it with His most bitter Passion. Happy will you be if, by the light of this truth, you acquire a spirit worthy of a Christian, resolving, as so many great saints have done, thenceforward to copy in yourself and your whole life that pattern of perfect mortification given to you on Calvary by the crucified Son of God, thus declaring a thorough, perpetual, and irreconcilable hostility to your body, so that, whereas you have hitherto loved it inordinately, and to its own detriment, you will henceforward, in the same measure, hate it with a holy and salutary hatred, that, as you have studied to indulge and pamper it, so you will now be careful to afflict and deny it; in short, that in the same degree that you have formerly been weak in granting it every gratification, and protecting it from every inconvenience, you will in future be strict in refusing it everything to which it is inclined, and in making it submit to everything from which it shrinks. And if you have not the courage to break with it thus completely, and yet desire to imitate Christ, only less rigorously, make the resolution that you will mortify yourself after His example in what is most necessary, that is, in the five following points. In the first place, never allow the body any of those gratifications which, on the one hand, are unnecessary, and which, on the other, you know to be very prejudicial to liberty and union with God, either because of their particular character, or from your indulging in them too freely. Secondly, deny it also from time to time, and often in the day, both to increase your merit, and to gain greater

power over it, some of those delights, even which are not positively injurious to the soul. Thirdly, do not be over anxious, as very fastidious persons are, to escape everything which is an inconvenience to it, even slight and common ones, as, for example, heat and cold, and other similar annoyances, and do not continually seek for every possible way of avoiding them, but learn to bear some degree of such inconveniences. Fourthly, accustom yourself to bear, not only patiently, but cheerfully and thankfully, the bodily ills and sufferings which God sometimes sends you, such things as headaches or toothaches, remembering the far greater pains which the Son of God endured in the same parts of the body, and rejoicing to be able to resemble Him in some manner and degree. Fifthly, make use sometimes, for its chastisement, of voluntary punishments, such as hair-shirts, disciplines, fasting, and other similar penances, fixing a certain amount daily, weekly, or monthly, according to your strength, which amount may very well be increased on extraordinary occasions, but never omitted or diminished through fastidiousness or laziness.

EIGHTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Resurrection of our Lord.

SUMMARY.

I. Consider that the Soul of our Lord, before re-entering His Body, showed it, as it lay in the sepulchre, covered with wounds and scars, to the holy fathers of Limbus; their affections on beholding it, and thinking at what great cost to Himself He had purchased their salvation.

II. Consider the instantaneous and wonderful change in that most holy Body at the moment of Its reunion with the Soul, from the deepest humiliation to ineffable glory; and that the bodies of al who now strive to mortify them after the example of Christ, shall rise in the same glory at the appointed time, that is, at the last day.

II. We, too, should strive to rise spiritually with Christ, that is, to pass to a new and heavenly life. And this we shall do, if we come out of the Exercises with our souls as completely changed as His Body was when He came from the sepulchre.

I. Consider that before His Resurrection, our Lord, as there is great reason to believe, was pleased to let the holy souls of Limbus see how much He had suffered for the redemption of mankind, and that for this purpose He led them to the sepulchre where His dead Body was lying, and showed them one by one all the Wounds which had been made during His Passion by the scourges, the thorns and the nails. And who can express the ecstasy of wonder in which they were lost

and the tender affections of gratitude which broke from those holy souls at that sight so unlooked for, and at the fuller explanation which He gave them? "What, Lord? Is this Body, thus torn and scarred from head to foot, the one which You assumed for our salvation? And all those bitter and terrible sufferings —was it for us, who are less in comparison of You than an ant, a fly, an atom, that You, the King of Glory, the Sovereign of the universe, the God of infinite greatness, were pleased to endure them in this Body? What an unheard of, what an inconceivable prodigy of mercy!—how boundless, how incredible! For who would have thought so strange a marvel possible, as that a God such as You are, needing nothing, full of beatitude in Yourself, the final End of all Being, possessing no object worthy of Your love save Your own perfections, should, for love of vile and wretched creatures, be moved to suffer more than any creature has ever suffered? We knew, Lord, that Your mercy was boundless, Your goodness infinite, Your love for us incomparable: but we could never have believed that they would go such lengths, and be manifested in so surpassing a way. It would have been far beyond the worth of our salvation if You had purchased it with one single drop of Your Divine Blood, not with streams so abundant. All the strength of our gratitude is far too feeble to thank and praise You worthily for Your redeeming us thus, and at so great a cost, and therefore we will never cease rendering You repeated thanks and praises through all eternity." Such, surely, must have been the affections of those just souls in that place. Do you likewise endeavour to make them yours, as though you had been witnesses of the same spectacle.

II. Consider how our Lord, after having thus shown His dead lifeless Body, re-entered it with His Soul,

and re-animated it, but with a far better life; for it passed from one extreme to the other, from death to immortality, from suffering to impassibility, from pallor and bruises to a wonderful clarity, from the material weight of earthly bodies to the subtilty and agility proper to spirits. This, then, was the issue of the ignominy, the insults, the pain and anguish of that most sacred Body! They issued in honour and majesty, in glory and beatitude. Its suffering was great, but how great is its happiness! Its humiliation was deep, but how highly is it exalted! It was the most afflicted Body that ever lived on earth, but it is also the most glorious of all that will ever be in heaven. And what is above all to be noted, His Passion did not last quite a day, since it began on the Thursday night and ended before Friday evening: whereas the blessedness in which He rose will be for all ages: "Of His Kingdom there shall be no end." Well, then, that which took place in Christ, our Head, will take place in us also, who are His members. As was His Resurrection, such, likewise, will be ours. As the sufferings which He endured out of obedience to His Eternal Father ended in a beatitude both incomparably greater and everlasting, so, too, will those end which we now endure for the same reason: "A faithful saying; for if we be dead with Him we shall live also with Him; if we suffer we shall also reign with Him."[1] If, then, this is true, as you acknowledge, how is it that, instead of courting sufferings, there is nothing that you more dread and avoid? Why, instead of mortifying your body and treating it hardly, do you so carefully guard it from all discomfort and inconvenience? Why, instead of considering yourself highly favoured when Christ gives you a share in His Cross, do you look upon yourself as over-tasked, and complain that you have

[1] 2 Timothy ii. 11, 12.

not strength for the burden? Is it possible that the momentary suffering of the present has greater power to alarm you than the eternal happiness of the future has to encourage you? Where is your reason? Where is your faith? Have you no right conception of that immortal and blessed life which God has in store for you as the recompense of these brief sufferings? Oh, judge more wisely, more like a Christian; repeat frequently, still more with your heart than your tongue: "Expecto resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi sæculi." Do not allow natural feeling to prevail over your perception of supernatural truths, but, as your Saviour, "having joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame;"[2] so "Christ having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought,"[3] "knowing that He Who raised up Jesus, will raise us up also with Jesus."[4] Arm yourself, I say, with this great thought, which was that with which the martyrs were armed when they so joyfully endured every kind of torture. And if your body, unaccustomed to contemplate any but the things of sense, shrinks from something that is to be suffered for God's service, do you, who have eyes and light to discern invisible things also, instead of allowing yourself to be disheartened by its repugnance, study on the contrary to encourage it, saying: "Be strong, O my body, do not be cast down; for we must be a little afflicted now by many temptations. All these afflictions and sufferings will soon be over, and oh, if thou knewest what glory and blessedness they will end in! Wait a little; have patience for these short days of earthly life; then, when that last day dawns, which no night will follow, and which is a day lasting for ever, thou wilt see the overflowing and imperishable recompense kept in store by God, Who is a liberal rewarder, for thy brief

[2] Heb. xii. 2. [3] 1 St. Peter iv. 1. [4] 2 Cor. iv. 14.

sufferings. Then, when thou hast become impassible, immortal, glorious, and happy beyond all that thy senses can conceive, how wilt thou bless these mortifications and pains and penances which now distress thee! How will all the trials thou didst suffer in thy mortal life seem lighter than a feather, more transitory than a flash of lightning, in comparison with that eternal weight of glory! How fortunate and happy, in short, wilt thou call thyself, after receiving so vast a prize, for having endured the very things which now thou thinkest a misery, and the only regret thou wilt feel will be not to have suffered more for God!"

III. Consider that in order to rise on the last day to that glorious and immortal life, to which Christ, the Head of the elect and the "First-born of the dead," rose on the third day after His Passion, you must rise also spiritually with Him, according to the Apostle's saying, that "as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life."[5] And this you will do if you come out of the Exercises with the same change and amendment as to your soul, with which the Body of Christ came out of the sepulchre. As that most sacred Body, which was once subject to death, came out immortal—"Christ rising again from the dead dieth now no more"[6]—so your soul, if before making the Exercises it was gradually dying to the supernatural life of Divine grace, ought to come out of them with so great a horror of mortal sin as to feel incapable of ever again dying by its means. As the fragility and the sensitiveness of the former to feel and suffer everything inflicted on it was changed to such strength that no weapon of earth nor thunderbolt of heaven could make the faintest impression on it, so, too, as the latter was formerly apt to be injured by every impulse of passion or suggestion

[5] Romans vi. 4. [6] Romans vi. 9.

of the devil, or evil example and counsel, it ought in future to be unhurt, and, so to speak, impassible amidst all these assaults. As in the one case the unsightliness of the bruises, wounds, and blood was changed into a beauty, and brightness of glory in comparison of which the light of the sun is darkness, so in the other the dimness of imperfect knowledge and of perverse conduct should be changed into the brightness of a supernatural intelligence for the guidance of your own life, and into the light of good example for the edification of your neighbour. As, in fine, that Body, having lost its natural weight, acquired a lightness beyond that of flame in mounting heavenwards, and an agility beyond that of the wind in flying where it would, so, too, should your soul, hitherto so heavy and weighed down by its earthly concupiscences, acquire a new facility in rising to heavenly thoughts, and in hastening with promptitude wherever the will of God calls it. This, then, is that mystical and interior resurrection with which all who make the Spiritual Exercises well come out of them, and with which you should strive this evening to come out of them : and you may be very sure that the more perfectly this result takes place in your soul, the more blessed and adorned with the qualities of that glorified Body will your body be when it shall rise again on the day of Final Judgment.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Paradise, considered in general as being a state of happiness free from all evil, full of all good, eternal in duration, and infallibly promised by God to all who serve Him with due fidelity.

SUMMARY.

I. There is no sort of evil in Paradise.

II. There is there the plenitude of every good, each of which is enjoyed in the highest degree.

III. This plenitude of good will be enjoyed for all eternity.

IV. This happy state is prepared by God for every one of us, and the attainment of it is in our own power.

I. Consider that none of those ills to which we are subject in this life are to be found in Paradise: neither hunger, nor thirst, heat nor cold, toil nor weariness, sickness nor pain; there are no wrongs, injuries, law-suits, and losses of property, no vexation, sadness, disquietude, or painful thoughts. These and all other possible miseries that are endured in this world are for ever banished from that happy land: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away. . . . . They shall no more hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun fall on them nor any heat."[1] Every one who is admitted into that blissful mansion will turn round as he sets his foot on its threshold, saying: "Farewell, all miseries, and pains, and sorrows of earth; you are over for ever for me." Suppose, then, that there were

[1] Apoc. xxi. 4; vii. 16.

no other advantage in the lot of the blessed than this immunity and exemption from all evil, would it not be worth purchasing at any cost, for that reason only? We see every day that covetous men willingly spend large sums, and sensual men abstain as long as is necessary from their unlawful practices, for the sake of getting rid of some painful and grievous malady, which is only one out of innumerable human miseries. How much more reasonable is it, then, that they should do the same in order to gain the glory and beatitude of heaven, that is, to be for ever freed, not only from that particular malady, but from every other possible ill? And yet (would it be believed?) neither can the former class be induced to expend even the half of those sums, nor the latter to refrain for so much as a week from their pernicious pleasures, in order to obtain so much more perfect and enduring a state of health. Is not this as extreme a madness as it would be to dread and avoid a solitary evil more than all possible evils put together?

II. Consider that the happiness of Paradise, besides being entirely free from even the slightest taint of evil, is, in addition, a state, *omnium bonorum aggregatione perfectus*, that is to say, a perfect plenitude of every imaginable good; riches, honours, pleasures, glory, knowledge, power, and gladness, beyond all that not only can be experienced by themselves, but beyond all that can be imagined by man, according to the testimony of the Apostle, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."[2] And not only is this most certain by faith, but clearly proved by comparing it with the happiness enjoyed in this world by many sinners, such as, in former times, by Alexander the Great, or Augustus Cæsar,

[2] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

and in our own day by the Grand Turk or the Emperor of China, masters of so many countries, whose nod is obeyed by so many millions of subjects, who are reverenced as earthly divinities, and the arbiters of their destiny by so many nations who are dreaded for their power, even by foreigners, possessed of riches, treasures, comforts, pleasures, and enjoyments, not only sufficient for the necessities and desires of nature, but in greater abundance than the very excess of luxury requires. Is it not an evident conclusion from this that if God bestows so great an abundance of goods in this earthly exile on those who are rebels and enemies to Him, He will give a far greater store in His heavenly kingdom to His friends and children? After having drawn this conclusion, and decided beyond a doubt that the happiness of the least of the saints immeasurably transcends that of all these monarchs, go on reasoning thus with yourself: "What is there that I would not do to possess the empire of Augustus Cæsar or of the Grand Turk? Should I find any difficulty in making peace with my bitterest enemy, in breaking off any bad practice, in making restitution of either property or character to any one whom I unjustly deprived of them, of ceasing for ever from the use of oaths and bad language, in short, of doing everything that God has commanded in His law for the sake of gaining such an empire?" Then answer yourself thus; "Not only would I do all this readily and cheerfully, but I would also willingly accept any other condition that might be proposed to me, no matter how difficult, hard, and severe, in order to attain to that rank: why, then, do I not far more readily and willingly overcome the much smaller difficulties which I find in the thorough observance of God's commandments, when I know of faith, that by this means I shall infallibly gain the glory of heaven, that is to say, a greatness and happiness in

comparison of which all that of Augustus Cæsar or of the Grand Turk is mere child's play?" You may also remark that in order to induce you to observe the law of God thoroughly and readily, it is not necessary to consider the fear of any punishment, temporal or eternal, with which its transgressors are threatened. For it is evident that if there were no such place as hell, and if God, when He issued His commandments, had not attached any punishment to their transgression, but only promised His everlasting kingdom to those who keep them faithfully, every one who has a right appreciation of that inestimable reward ought to be just as desirous as now to keep them, and to say to himself: "What does it matter to me that there is no hell awaiting sinners? Is it a light thing? Is it not, on the contrary, sufficient inducement to resist all the allurements of sin, that by committing it I incur the loss of Paradise, that is of my only and perfect beatitude? The man who needs terror and threats to persuade him to seek after so immeasurable a good, slights it most grievously, as deeming it insufficient, apart from every other inducement to captivate the soul, and cause it gladly to give up all the pleasures and advantages of this life for the sake of gaining it. It is only children who will not study unless they are threatened with the rod. Wise and mature persons are sufficiently attracted to desire and seek after anything by seeing that it is for their real good. Should I require a drawn sword and threats of death to force me to take possession of an earthly kingdom? Should I not, on the contrary, laugh at any one who took that way with me, and tell him that he need not trouble himself to use such unnecessary arguments, for that I considered it in itself a very good and desirable thing to be a king? Well, then, if such are my dispositions with regard to an earthly kingdom, why should they be different, why

should I require extrinsic arguments with regard to one that is eternal and heavenly? O Paradise!—possession of God!—the greatest of blessings, and the only true rest of the soul, I am utterly unworthy of ever enjoying thee, if thou art not, in thyself, inducement enough for being sought for; if hell has greater power to drive me than thou hast to attract me to thee; if, in short, I hasten to thy bliss driven by extreme fear of punishment, and like one flying to a place of refuge, rather than urged by pure love, with full desire of will, and like one tending to his centre."

III. Consider that this happiness, so free from every ill, so full of every good, will be enjoyed by those who attain it, not for a hundred, a thousand, or a hundred thousand years, but for as many as are contained in the endless, ever-beginning *plus ultra* of eternity, and that therefore, if there were no other reason for valuing it infinitely more highly than any temporal happiness of this life, this alone would be sufficient. For the longer any blessing is enjoyed, the more its value is enhanced. And as it is felt to be a hundred times more desirable to possess twenty crowns than one, and incalculably more so to possess an incalculable number, so to enjoy a blessing for a hundred years is a hundred times better than to enjoy it for but one; and to enjoy it for an infinite number of years, should be infinitely more valued than to enjoy it for a hundred. So that even though the happiness of those who have gained heaven did not surpass that which can be enjoyed on earth, the former ought still to be infinitely preferred to the latter by every wise man, on account of the difference of duration between them, the one lasting for ever, the other not longer than a century: how much more, when, besides this disproportion the former is full of every kind of good, and untroubled by the smallest ill, and the latter lacks so many sorts of good,

is but scantily supplied with any, and has, at the best, more of evil than of good in it? Suppose that the devil offered you, as he did to our Lord in the desert, "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," that is to say, all the riches, honours, power, and pleasures of earth, with a promise that you should enjoy them fully and superabundantly for a hundred years on condition that you should consent to commit some mortal sin at his instigation. What would be all this happiness offered to you by him for the price of your sin in comparison of that which is promised to you by God on condition of your keeping yourself from mortal sin? Surely, less than nothing; for not only is it incomparably less in regard of the abundance of its goods, and in the fact of its being accompanied by all the bodily and mental miseries to which every one is naturally subject, even the richest in exterior advantages; but besides this drawback, when once these hundred years have passed away with their wonted swiftness, it would all be over for you in an instant, and through all the coming eternity could bring you no more fruit or pleasure than if you had not really enjoyed it, but only dreamt that you had done so; whereas the beatitude promised by God to His servants, besides being far fuller of blessings and perfectly free from every evil, will, after any imaginary lapse of centuries, be always beginning, always perfect, always indefectible, always absolutely certain, not only of never ceasing, but of never diminishing in the slightest degree As then, if you would act like a wise man, you should laugh the devil to scorn for offering you the greates and longest happiness that can be enjoyed on earth in order to induce you to sin, or, in other words to renounce Paradise, how much more reason have you to scorn him and his promises, when in exchange for that perfect and unfailing beatitude he offers you nothing

but very small and very short-lived enjoyments such as are all those which you can gain *now* and *here* by sinning at his instigation? Oh, learn at last to weigh things in a just balance, and whenever any earthly advantage tempts you to sin, say to yourself: "If I sin I shall enjoy this happiness for a very short while; if I do not sin I shall enjoy every possible happiness for a whole eternity;" and then decide, as reason dictates that you should, between two choices so unequal.

IV. Consider that the happiness on which you have been meditating, whether regarded as to its freedom from all evil, or its superabundance of all good things, or its ceaseless duration, is not a beautiful dream, a poetical invention, or a merely speculative idea, more to be admired than hoped for, but a good for which as for our only end, God has created us all, and the attainment of which He has placed in our own hands, and that He has no greater desire than to put us as soon as possible, that is to say, after a few years of this our earthly life, in its blissful and sure possession. Yes, surely: "Fear not," let no one doubt it, or fear the contrary, "it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom."[8] Our great Father in Heaven keeps the doors of His most blessed kingdom always open to every one who desires to enter. He has Himself declared it; it is a promise which, being made by Him cannot possibly fail, and is just as certain as His own necessary and Eternal Being. And each one of us, may raise his eyes to heaven, and say to himself with absolute certainty: "This happy country, this palace of the King of kings, this land of eternal and perfect joy is made for me: it is God Who invites me thither. There the saints and angels are waiting for me as the companion of their bliss, and if I take the right road to it, there is no hostile power of men or devils that can

[8] St. Luke xii. 32.

bar my entrance. A few more years and the happy hour will come when I may go there; however long my life may be, that moment cannot be distant, every day is bringing it nearer, and very soon I shall stand on the threshold." Is not this thought enough to alleviate every suffering of our earthly exile, and not only to make all the labours of God's service light, but to make us insensible to them? Surely it is: and we have a certain proof of this in the examples of the saints, who in its strength not only found the keeping of God's law very easy, but made nothing of the hardest and most painful things which the Evangelical Counsels have added to it. And if we, on the contrary, find it so difficult to avoid sin, to abstain from the pleasures of sense, to mortify our natural inclinations, and to bear even a slight trouble for the love of God, the real reason is, that either we do not consider, or do not vividly realize the vast and eternal glory which is to be attained by these means. For, if we kept it in sight, and had a right conception of it, it would be not only very easy to fulfil every one of God's commandments, but all but impossible to transgress them; and instead of avoiding as an intolerable burden the toil and suffering of evangelical mortification, we should go in quest of them as our truest and chiefest riches. The whole of this important matter, therefore, is comprised in continually meditating, and impressing as deeply as possible on our minds the ineffable bliss which God has prepared in heaven for His servants, since on this depends all our strength or weakness in His holy service. And as, without this support we feel languid, cold, cowardly, negligent, full of discouragement, fear, and sloth: so by the courage and vigour inspired by its means, everything will become plain and easy to us, we shall rise superior to all sensible things, and run with the speed and strength

of giants rather than of men, along the path of Christian perfection; we shall make light of all earthly fears and dangers, no labour will tire us, no difficulty hinder us, no suffering will seem to us more than a feather's weight.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On Paradise, considered in particular, that is to say, with regard to the happiness enjoyed there by the blessed, both interior, consisting in the blessings of the soul and body, and exterior, with reference to the qualities both of the place and the companions of their abode.

SUMMARY.

I. The happiness which the soul enjoys there.
II. The happiness which the body enjoys there.
III. The happiness which is enjoyed there as to place.
IV. The happiness which is enjoyed there as to company.

I. Consider the perfect and indescribable happiness which the Blessed enjoy in their souls. For, first, no sooner does the soul enter heaven than there is instantaneously infused into it by God a most complete and comprehensive knowledge of all sciences, dialectics, physics, medicine, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, theology, and the rest, so that every uneducated woman, every common labourer, every little child, however ignorant in themselves, will, once admitted into heaven, know incomparably more about all these sciences than the greatest professors of them have ever known. Is not this an inestimable treasure, and one well worth our buying at the cost of any amount of toil and fatigue? What do not men go through in this world for the acquirement of only one science? We see them spending their days and nights apart from intercourse with their friends and from nearly all the

relaxations of human life, heedless of the winter's cold and the summer's heat applying their minds to the closest speculation. And what, after all, is the result of this toilsome and constant labour? Nothing, surely, at the most but the attainment after twenty, thirty years and more, of an uncertain, confused, and very scanty sort of comprehension of the subject they have been studying. For there is no science in which the number of truths untouched upon and still to be learnt does not far exceed that of the truths which are known to its most celebrated and consummate teachers, whereas the souls of the Blessed perfectly and instantaneously grasp and comprehend all sciences, and everything that can be known in each one of them.

And yet all knowledge of this kind is nothing compared to the intuitive and immediate knowledge of God with which the soul is filled when, in an instant, the veil is drawn aside, and there is openly and freely revealed before its eyes what is, in Its proper nature, that first and universal Essence, the abode of beauties, marvels, and perfections, never seen, never imagined, incomprehensible, immense, and infinite. My God! what a sight will that be! How far sweeter than all besides, how satisfying to the soul, how fully sufficient to make the beholder blessed! At present we are incapable not only of forming a just conception of it, but even of catching the faintest glimmering, or conceiving an idea in the most distant way resembling it. It must be enough for us to know that the mind of that blessed one, on first beholding God, will be utterly overpowered, ravished, absorbed, and rapt out of itself in that sudden ecstasy of marvelling gladness, and that while eternity lasts, without weariness or distraction, or desire of anything besides, it will remain in motionless contemplation of that blessed Object, inebriated with His sweetness, ever the same, yet ever

new, always satiated with Him, always thirsting for Him. And hence there will spring up in the souls of those who have attained the Beatific Vision, a joy and gladness, not only "surpassing all sense," because it will transcend all possible pleasure ever felt on earth, but such as has never even "entered the heart of man," because it will surpass by its infinite sweetness all that can be conceived by the imagination. For how is it possible that the soul, there contemplating its great Creator, not darkly or through veils, but "as He is," in His own proper and uncreated essence, and so discerning with a perfect and intuitive knowledge how infinitely beautiful and blessed He is, should not both love Him "with all its heart and strength," and loving Him thus intensely, enjoy in equal proportion its own complete beatitude? It is not possible, for the supreme and infinite Beauty cannot be clearly seen without kindling in the will of the beholder the intensest possible love of Itself, and it is in the nature of every love that the one who loves so appropriates the good things belonging to the one who is loved, that he enjoys them as though he himself possessed them; as the happiness of her child affords the same pleasure to a mother, as if it were her own, so the soul which sees God, being obliged to love Him more than any other object, more even than itself, will, of necessity, in a certain manner make its own that essential and infinite plenitude of bliss which it sees Him enjoy, and consequently will rejoice and delight in it as though it were itself in the enjoyment of it.

And, further, if the possession of any good thing always gives greater delight, in proportion to the greatness of the thing possessed, let every one conclude for himself what must be the happiness felt by him who, by means of his love, has made his own, and actually possesses all that vast multitude of perfections and

blessedness infinitely enjoyed by God. I venture to say that his happiness will be infinite, and almost more than infinite; for since every enjoyment is the effect of love, and the effect being in proportion to the cause, the greater the love the greater the enjoyment, is not the enjoyment in a certain way infinite, and almost more than infinite, which, is felt by the soul which loving God more than itself, will in a certain manner rejoice more in the possession by God of His infinite beatitude, than if it had possessed that beatitude itself? Just imagine that it was granted to you alone to possess all the riches, honours, pleasures, wisdom, glory, power, and every other good thing that ever was or could be possessed by all men and angels together; then, after reflecting how glad and rejoiced you would be by so rare a happiness, draw the conclusion that, beyond all doubt, our joy and satisfaction in heaven on account of the uncreated beatitude of God will be incomparably greater, and that for two reasons. First, because the abundance of all the good things which you would enjoy in the first case cannot be in any way compared with the infinite number of those far greater goods which form the beatitude of God, and which will be in heaven the cause of your enjoyment. Secondly, because, loving God more than yourself, as you will do in heaven, you will consequently derive greater enjoyment and happiness from the goods He possesses than you could do from any of your own. "For in the same degree that any one loves another, does he rejoice in his good; and as in that perfect happiness every one will love God incomparably more than he loves himself and all others who are with him, so will he rejoice in the blessedness of God incalculably more than in his own and that of all others. But if (the blessed) will so love God with all their heart and mind and soul, that their

whole heart and mind and soul will not be enough for the worthiness of that love; it is evident that they will so rejoice with all their heart, mind, and soul that the whole of heart, mind, and soul, will not be enough for the plenitude of their joy." This is St. Anselm's argument, and his conclusion is that the joy of every one who, when admitted to the vision of God, thus loves and enjoys Him, must be so great as not only to fill his whole soul with its sweetness, but that, being much greater than the soul and incapable of being confined within a finite heart, it will also surround it completely, just as a sponge immersed in the sea is entirely filled and entirely surrounded by it. And long before St. Anselm the same thing was declared by the Incarnate Word, when in inviting the elect soul, not merely to receive its beatitude, but to be steeped in it, as in a sea far vaster than it can contain, He said "enter," yes, "enter into the joy of thy Lord." O joy beyond compare! a joy which we cannot conceive in the least degree, and compared to which the greatest of earthly delights is but a spark, a dream, a shadow of joy.

II. Consider the perfect felicity of the Blessed as to their bodies: and in order the better to understand it, bring before your imagination the greatest amount of excellence, perfection, and pleasure that you could desire in that part of your nature, and then say to yourself: "If I rise again with the elect I shall have a body incomparably more perfect and blessed than I have ever been able to desire." And to prove the truth of this: What are the qualities which you would chiefly desire in it? I think they would be these five, in which its perfection is usually supposed to consist: beauty and grace of appearance, vigour and energy of strength, unwearied speed and swiftness of motion, health free from the least touch of disease, and the

plenitude of present enjoyment in all its senses. Now, is there one of these qualities in which the lowest of glorified bodies does not surpass all that you have ever seen in the world or pictured to your imagination? As to beauty, it will be found in those bodies, whether we consider the perfect symmetry of their parts, or the brightness and softness of colouring, such as has never been seen, or the radiance, beyond that of the sun, which will be diffused through all their members, or the brilliant light of their eyes, or the grace and dignity of their movements: all this, I say, will be so admirable and surpassing and wonderful, that when our Lord had granted a vision of her glorified body to St. Teresa, she declares that if she were to try for years and years, she could never express its beauty, because it is an object exceeding all that we can imagine here below, and which takes the beholder out of himself, and the glory and brilliance which it possesses are not like those of the sun or other luminous bodies of our universe, which dazzle and tire the eyes, but, on the contrary, refresh them with marvellous sweetness, although incomparably brighter than the light of the sun. In short, beauty of this kind is so new and inappreciable by our senses that no one, though he should spend his life in thinking of it, could form a true and just idea on the subject. And what shall we say of the vigour, power, and force of action, in comparison of which the strength of a Samson or a Hercules is but the weakness of a child or the effort of a sick man? Equally wonderful will be the agility of their movements, beyond that of wind or lightning, so that in the twinkling of an eye, they will be able to go to any place they choose, however far distant, as from one pole to the other, or from the highest heaven to the earth and back. And this is all the more the case by reason of the gift of "subtility," by means of which they will be able, like

spirits, to penetrate the hardest bodies, and pass through them without being any more hindered or retarded than if they were passing through pure air. As to health, it is enough to say and know that they will be wholly impassible, and that there will exist no opposing power capable of affecting and hurting them by even the very least injury. Lastly, each of their senses will enjoy as much pleasure as it can desire: the eyes will always be delighted with the beautiful sight of the heaven and of so many glorified bodies; the ears with the harmony of the sweetest music, compared to which all earthly strains will seem like rustic pipes or the bleating of sheep; the smell with the continual fragrance of perfumes, flowers, and spices, such as never were known on earth; the taste with a sweetness residing in itself, so delicious that all the most exquisite banquets in the world are, in comparison, what the husks and garbage devoured by swine are to such banquets; and lastly, the touch with a healthy vigour and ethereal keenness which will be diffused through all the organs and nerves of the body, causing it to feel a pleasure, free indeed from the excitement and weariness of sensual pleasures, but as to the degrees of gratification, far greater than all of them.

In short, they will be bodies formed by God Himself with a workmanship miraculously exquisite, and surpassing all the powers of nature, for no other end but that of perfect and infinite enjoyment. From all this it may be gathered what a mere nothing, when contrasted with this incomparable felicity, are both the gratifications with which sinners indulge their flesh, and the mortifications with which the saints afflict it, and that the man who has the most love for his body is he who, by chastising it during this short life, thus merits for it so happy a state in eternity. "O blessed penance! which has purchased for me so great

a glory," said St. Peter of Alcantara when he appeared after his death to St. Teresa; and so, too, will you say at the resurrection if you follow his example in mortifying your bodies here.

III. Consider the happiness which the Blessed will derive from the place where they will dwell for ever. For this habitual home of theirs will be the highest of the heavens, which we call the Empyrean, on account of its wonderful light and radiance, a sphere so vast, that in comparison not only the most ample palaces and extensive cities, but even the whole terrestial globe dwindles to a tiny speck. What can we say of so immense a dwelling place? What lofty halls, what wide squares, what long galleries and avenues will be seen in that great palace of God! "O Israel, how great is the house of God, and how vast is the place of His possession! It is great and hath no end, it is high and immense."[1] The heart dilates at the thought of such vastness, and looking down from that height towards the earth, and not being able to discern it, so small is it, and so very far off, despises those empires which are striven after by human ambition in that minute spot, with wars so furious, and in which the pride of monarchs glories, as though they were the summit of grandeur. But what can we say of the material of which is composed that which I know not whether to call the palace or the world of heaven? What can it be? Is it marble, precious stones, gold, silver, or any other metal? Nay, those are substances which may be deemed valuable in our poor huts of this world, but, being corruptible things, are unworthy of a place in that glorious mansion, where not only walls and roof, but the very floor is paved with stars. Yes, truly, the stars will be the pavement of that city, and on them

[1] Baruch iii. 24, 25.

will tread the princes of Paradise, the servants of the heavenly King, unlike the princes of this world who walk on the mire of earth. Such is the splendour which God deems worthy to be employed for the exaltation and honour of His elect, concerning whom, therefore, the Prophet exclams with good reason: "Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honourable, their principality is exceedingly strengthened."[2] And amongst whom he desires, with sweet longing, that he, too, may be numbered, when he sings in another Psalm: "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts, my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord."[3] Do you, too, with the like affections admire that majesty of heaven, which alone deserves to be called true majesty, and in comparison of it despise everything that is applauded by blinded minds in this low world as splendid, precious, or sublime, and be not troubled if in the few short days of this life your poverty is such as to allow you only a little corner of a confined and uncomfortable room, or if you are forbidden by religious inclosure to go out for your pleasure when and where you like, or if you are obliged by some illness to spend months and years all but stifled in the close atmosphere of a little room, or even without moving in the narrow space of your bed. It is no great matter: this is not your abiding place; it is only an inn where you are stopping on the way; you will soon quit these narrow bounds and pass from this earthly prison to the city of God, the Jerusalem which is above, the heavenly world and kingdom, "the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God," where for all eternity there are prepared for you stately palaces, ample space, many dwelling-places, and liberty to go where you will: "Then

[2] Psalm cxxxviii. 17. [3] Psalm lxxxiii. 1.

shalt thou see and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged." [4]

IV. Consider, in addition to the causes already mentioned, how delightful and happy will be the life of the Blessed, because of the society and intercourse which they will enjoy in heaven. We all know how this joy and pleasure is greater in proportion as those among whom we live are more distinguished by noble birth, more beautiful in countenance, more polished in manners and educated in mind, more amiable in disposition, and bound to us by closer affection. There are, therefore, no words to describe the sweetness we shall taste in conversing with persons who are endowed with all these qualities in a surpassing degree, nor how the hours thus spent will pass without seeming longer than moments, so great will be the pleasure we enjoy. This, then, will be the society and intercourse we shall have when we come to be admitted to the citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem, for we shall have as our companions there the angels and saints, persons of the highest nobility, and higher in dignity than any earthly sovereigns, seeing that they are princes of Paradise and sons of God. So fair are they to behold, and radiant with so marvellous a beauty, that all eyes will be ravished and all hearts won by the charm of their sweetness; they will be gifted with every kind of virtue and excellence, and without the least speck of imperfection which could possibly trouble those who live with them; they will all be most clear of intellect, and endowed with learning so universal that no subject can be brought forward on which they will not be able to discourse exhaustively; so beaming with joy, so overflowing with gladness that they will shed it in full streams over all they converse with; lastly, so united in perfect charity that they love each other even as they

[4] Isaias lx. 5.

love themselves. And all this being so, I leave you to decide whether you can compare with intercourse so delightful on all grounds the dissipated meetings of worldly people, where not only does a frivolous and disorderly merriment often end in the sharpness of quarrels and enmity, but hardly ever escapes being troubled by still greater bitterness, and whether the man who looks for the former can esteem it a hard thing to abstain from the latter.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

On the love of God; that is, on the motives which urge us to love God above all things.

SUMMARY.

I. We ought to love God above all things for His infinite beauty and goodness.

II. We ought also to be moved to do so by His incomparable charity and beneficence towards us.

III. Another very powerful motive thus to love Him should be also our own interest, that is to say, the rare and precious fruits which this love of God produces.

I. Consider what a powerful motive for loving God above all things is supplied by His infinite perfection, beauty, and goodness. For surely the good and the beautiful are the objects for which our capacity of loving has been given to us, and towards which our desires tend as naturally as iron to the loadstone; for there is no man so barbarous, stupid, and brutish as not to be inclined to love a good and beautiful thing when he sees it. And what value can we put upon all the good and beautiful things that ever were, are, or shall be in the world, when compared with God? Less, assuredly, than that of a drop compared to the ocean, or a spark to the sun. For, at the most, all their beauty and loveliness is no more than a very small participation of that primary, universal, and infinite Beauty which is inherent in the Supreme Divine Essence as in its inexhausted Source, from Whom, as they all proceed for all eternity can countless others proceed, each a thousand times more good and beautiful than those

preceding it, while all the time It remains undiminished in the least degree, however lavishly It is diffused, and nothing proceeding from It can, I will not say be equal to It, but bear any sort of proportion to It, or be anything short of infinitely less than It. And, to understand this more clearly, picture to yourself an infinite sphere of light from which a little spark has sprung forth; then, after observing that this tiny speck of light is a mere nothing compared to the vast brilliance of the sphere, regard the latter as an image of the infinite essence of God, and the former of every thing which is outside Him, and be very sure that in creating the universe, with all the good and beautiful things contained in it, He has but emitted a very slender ray of His uncreated perfection and beauty, so that all this can be considered no more in comparison of Him, than that little spark can be called brilliant when compared with the infinite sphere of light from which it sprang forth. Since, then, all created perfection is but a very small, because a finite, participation of the excellence so much greater, because infinite, with which we see them displayed in God, reason thus with yourself: "If these creatures that I see attract me so powerfully to love them by their beauty, which is defective and imperfect, and only imparted to them in a limited degree, how much more ought I to be attracted by their uncreated Maker, Who is the universal Origin of all existing or possible goodness and beauty! More, certainly, beyond all comparison; for the natural instinct which leads us to love what is good and beautiful, leads us also to love them more or less in proportion to their goodness and beauty. And as, if I had to choose between two objects, one possessing ten and the other a thousand degrees of beauty, I could not help loving the latter more than the former, how is it possible that I should not love the beauty of God more

than all created beauty, which it transcends not a hundred nor a thousand times, but infinitely? But this superiority is in no way appreciable by my senses. And what of that, when both reason and faith prove it with absolute certainty? The former proves it *à priori*, by showing clearly that not only all existing beauties are so many partial copies of that one ideal Beauty, but that an infinite number of others, each more excellent than the preceding one, may be successively copied from It throughout eternity. The same thing is also proved by faith *à posteriori;* for it bears witness that Its splendour is such, where It appears in Its proper likeness, that the blessed spirits in heaven cannot gaze on Its unveiled glory without being ravished and carried out of themselves with delight, so that for all eternity they are motionlessly contemplating It in perpetual and blissful ecstasy, and the only meaning of Paradise to them is thus ever to gaze in rapture and to faint with love." Both of these are very powerful arguments, which, as they leave no doubt in any one who studies them as to the immeasurable superiority of the Divine Beauty over every other, so too do they furnish the strongest motive for loving God, for this reason, even when only contemplated intellectually, more than any other object, however excellent, can be loved on account of its visible charms. We know that the saints had only this abstract knowledge, neither did they require any other; for, putting out of their thoughts every other possible object of love, they devoted their whole souls to Him, and did more for love of Him than ever was done by earthly lover for the sake of the fairest of creatures.

II. Consider another and most powerful reason for loving God above all things, which is supplied by the intense love which He first showed you. For we see every one, by natural instinct, love those who attract

him to do so by proofs of their true, free, and not only affectionate, but active and practical love for him; and thus if I find any one who, moved by pure kindness for me, labours for all my concerns as though they were his own, neglects no opportunity of forwarding my interests, zealously endeavours to assist me in all my necessities, and has more than once liberally relieved my poverty with large sums of money: nay, more—who once when I was attacked by enemies hastened to defend me, and saved my life at great risk to himself, and with great loss of blood; if, I say, I see any one act thus towards me, it is utterly impossible that I should not be attached to him, and kindled with an answering love for him. If I acted otherwise, and remained cold and insensible to all his benefits, I should be detested by all as an inhuman monster, more brutal than the brutes themselves, for they have often been seen to put off their natural ferocity and to display marks of reciprocal affection towards those who have fed them in their need, or cured them of some malady, or defended them from stronger animals. Tell me, now, was there ever a man who gave such proofs of love to friend, brother, or son, as God has given to you, His meanest servant? In the first place, who gave you this being which you have, and which is the best thing you can have on earth? Is it not given by His favour, and a favour bestowed without any obligation on His side, or merit on yours? If this were the extent of His liberality to you, would you not be more bound to Him by this obligation alone, than you could be to any created benefactor? But this was not all; for as if the human being, bestowed on you at your birth, were a small thing, He has added to it a supernatural and incomparably better one, making you, by sanctifying grace, a participator of His Divine Nature, His friend, His child, and His heir; so that you may reign with

Him in heaven for all eternity, glorious beyond all that you can imagine, and blest with His own beatitude, that is, with Himself, the Supreme and Infinite Good. What can you say of graces so far surpassing not only the scantiness of your merits, but what may be called the boundlessness of your desires? Again, what surer proof can there be of a wonderful and incomparable love than his incomparable patience in bearing with the many and grievous offences you have committed against Him? Surely, however deep the love borne by one person to another, even to a brother or a son, yet if the only return he receives is that of unkindness, insults, and injuries, it is impossible but that the love should gradually diminish; and if this goes on for long, it will at length, in consequence of that ill return, after five, eight, or at most ten outrages, either altogether cease or turn to hatred. How surpassing, then, must be the love of God for you, Who has gone on loving you, seeking your good, and acting towards you as the kindest of fathers, after not ten, but a hundred, or any possible number of offences? Surely a love which has remained unshaken by so many shocks must be believed to be unequalled and boundless in its strength. Lastly, if the crowning proof of love is to purchase the good of the person loved at the cost of one's own sufferings, at what greater cost could He purchase your salvation than by assuming a passible Body, and after the labours of three and thirty years letting It be torn by scourges, crowned with thorns, pierced by nails, and at last dying, covered with insults, wounds, and anguish on the Cross of shame? This is an excess of charity which neither father, mother, nor any of your most devoted friends would have shown you. Call to mind the wonderful refinements of that love, the greatness of your obligations, and then see what a monster in human shape, either utterly heartless, or with a

heart as cold as ice and as hard as stone, you would be, if you made no return of true and grateful affection to so lavish a Benefactor, so incomparable a Lover. Good God! is it possible that you will thus degenerate from your rational nature, thus abandon all sense of right, and show yourself less human than the very brutes? Why, the very least of the benefits I have mentioned ought to be enough to force you to love Him; and are not the whole of them enough? You would think yourself bound to perpetual service to any man who had done such things for you; and are you less bound to God? You say that there is no vice that you so detest and abhor as ingratitude. How, then, can you endure in yourself such ingratitude as has never been elsewhere witnessed? The Apostle exclaims that one guilty of such monstrous wickedness should be driven from the society of his fellows: "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema."[1] If there is a man who, having first received from our Lord proofs of so surpassing a love, does not love Him in return, let him be held in detestation and abhorrence, let him be shunned by all as an excommunicated and infamous person, unworthy to appear in the light of day. Do you dare to come under so terrible a malediction? Oh, no; revive in your heart that instinct which God has bestowed on all men, nay, even on brutes, the instinct of loving those who love them, and of loving most those who most love them; and as you have never been loved, favoured, or benefitted by any creature, not even by yourself, as you have been by God, so do you resolve never to love yourself or any creature more than Him; and if you are not able to offer Him such and so great a love as His boundless charity to you merits, endeavour at least to love Him in return to the extent of

[1] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

your power, that is, "with all your heart and soul and strength," with an entire, perfect, undivided love, which shall govern all the other loves of your heart as their absolute and universal sovereign.

III. Consider that even if these two motives, which have been mentioned, did not exist, your own interest would nevertheless be sufficient to make you love God above all things. For, if you mentally pass in review all the lovely things in the universe you will not find one so capable of ennobling, enriching, or satiating those who love Him as God is; nor, consequently on whom our love can so advantageously be set. And, first, with regard to nobility: we all know that there is nothing more characteristic of love than that transformation of the soul into the beloved object which makes it participate in its state, clothes it with its qualities, and conforms to it all its thoughts, habits, and affections: so, therefore, we can all see how much more one who loves God and is, by virtue of this interior metamorphosis, lifted out of his own human being into the sublime Being of God, and, ennobled, than one who, by loving anything out of God, is united and as it were made one with created objects, none of which deserves to be esteemed more than the merest nothing in comparison with God, and the majority of which are very much inferior even to man; so that he cannot stoop to love them without lowering himself and debasing his condition by coming down from his higher level to their baseness. And this is a truth which was well understood by Seneca merely by the light of nature, and which made him exclaim, "Oh, how contemptible a thing is man unless he lifts himself above human things!" It is no less plain how great a difference there is between the riches and advantages which accrue from the love of God and the love of inferior goods, For however strong may be our love for any of these

it is not of itself sufficient to ensure our attainment of the desired good, whereas to love God perfectly is to possess Him, the universal and infinite Good. "Is it the same thing to love gold and to have it?" says St. Augustine; "Many love it who have it not. God cries aloud to us, 'Love Me, and you shall possess Me.'" Lastly, what shall we say of the satiety, happiness, and peace of loving God? Is there any other object by loving which we can hope for these in the perfection? Surely not. If you wish to make sure of this, ask the richest of earthly sovereigns if he is so satisfied with the amount of his revenue as not to desire any more. Ask one who has risen highest in the opinion of men by arms or literary talents, whether the glory he has acquired suffices him so that he wishes for no increase of it. They will make answer, the former that his wealth, the latter that his reputation, is but little in comparison of what it is possible and therefore desirable to acquire in addition. And if you pursued the inquiry further you would receive the same answer with regard to pleasures, dignities, extent of dominion, or any other good of this world, from those who possess them here in the greatest abundance: they are all more occupied with what they may still gain than with what they already possess; and so they are just as empty, eager, and restless in their plenty as others in their humbler lot. Still more is this the case, because, besides being limited, the goods of this world are found wanting in two other respects no less important: (1) that we cannot always obtain them in the measure in which we desire them; and (2) that when we have obtained them they may at any time fail us, do what we will. So that the person who loves them, besides not finding in any of them full satisfaction, finds also great cause for fear and sadness in every one of them; fear on account of the continual uncertainty

both of gaining what he wishes, and of continuing to possess it as long as he wishes, after he has gained it; and sadness because, as happens every day to these transitory goods, he sees the hopes of one and the possessions of another continually being lost. For it is impossible for one who loves an uncertain good to live free from anxiety, or for one who has lost the thing he loves to be free from sadness. So certain is this, that whoever examines one after another the troubles and disappointments of his past life will find that there is not one which did not spring from the love of some created good; a manifest proof, that if he had never loved any of those things, he would have had no vexation in his life. These then, are the fruits which created goods produce to those who set their affections on them: a continual harvest of anxiety, agitation, care, sorrow, and regret. But far otherwise is it with God, Who, as He contains in Himself alone the infinitude of all possible and desirable good things, so also, when we are united to Him by love, He leaves us nothing more to desire, and as all that He requires for the infallible attainment and indefectible possession of Himself, is to be loved, and as the fulness of the possession is only measured by the extent of the love, so it is impossible that He can cause any sadness or disquietude, except to those who either do not love Him, or love Him imperfectly. What, then, would be your folly, if, when you have in God an object Who both merits to be loved beyond all others, and is able to elevate, enrich, and satisfy those who love Him, beyond all others, you should bestow nearly all your love on earthly objects, not one of which displays more than a pale spark of beauty, or produces any harvest but one of agitation, trouble and bitterness. Even if you bore in your breast a hundred hearts, right reason would require you to consecrate them all to Him with-

out exception or reserve. But you have only one; and would you divide it among all sorts of creatures, so as to leave only a very small part of it for Him? Oh, take that heart of yours and offer it all to Him as a perfect holocaust, and declare that henceforth you will love nothing but Him, or in subordination to Him. Happy will you be if you do this! How sweet and easy will all the exercises of the spiritual life be to you from this time! With what rapid and wonderful progress will you advance in the path of Christian perfection! How glad and joyful will your life be: even here on earth how like that of those who possess God in their heavenly home! What unspeakable delight will you feel in thinking to yourself from time to time: "I belong wholly to God, and He to me: I live only to love Him: I act only to please Him: and He returns my love most perfectly, and regards my actions with complacency!" Such thoughts, and others like them, belong to those who give themselves to the love of God, and are the source of those spiritual consolations of which we are told that they exceed in savour and sweetness all natural pleasures; which can only be understood by those who experience them, and which caused the saints to enjoy a foretaste of their future beatitude in heaven in the midst of all the troubles and miseries of this life. Take heart, then; be bold and courageous. In order to gain these great rewards nothing is required of you but to love, and to love your chief good, and what condition can be made which is sweeter, more suitable to your nature, and more in conformity with the instincts of your rational appetite? "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet; blessed is the man that hopeth in Him."[2]

[2] Psalm xxxiii. 9.

MEDITATION ON THE ELECTION OF A STATE OF LIFE.

Which is added in conclusion for those who have not yet made it, and who are not hindered from deciding beforehand on that state of life which is best suited to them. It may also serve for making election of the calling a man intends to follow, as, for example, that of courtier, soldier, merchant, lawyer, and the like.

SUMMARY.

I. The election of his state is the most important of all the elections a man can make, because on it more than on any other, depends both his happiness in this life, and his eternal salvation in the next.

II. This matter being so important, that man acts most imprudently who does not use all diligence to discover and make choice of that state which is the best of all for him.

III. What are the conditions constituting the most eligible state, which ought therefore to be carefully inquired into by the man who would make a wise election.

IV. What is the necessary disposition for being able to discover and make choice of that which is the best of all the various states.

V. After having formed this disposition, the person in question ought to compare one with another the states which it is in his power to choose, and having seen which of them is, according to the principle laid down in the third point, the best, he ought, in the last place, to embrace that state with firm resolution.

I. Consider that of all the elections that you have made, or can make, there is none so important as the

election of the state in which you intend spending all the time you have to live; that is to say, whether you will remain in the world or go into religion, and, if the latter, into which particular order; so, too, if you remain in the world, whether you will do so in the married or celibate life, in the latter case whether you will be a voluntary celibate, as a layman in the world, or be bound by the obligation of priests and clerics. For, as in these states of life there is a great difference and inequality of duties, occupations, cares and aids, and as all are not equally adapted to the nature, inclination, and strength of everybody, it follows that to enter upon one rather than another must entail a proportionate difference of consequences and effects, both as to this life and the next. As to this life, we see numbers of persons on all sides living restless and dissatisfied in consequence of having inconsiderately tied themselves to the married state, or to some particular religious order, and discovering, too late, that it was not intended for them, that it was not to it that God called them, and that they would live much more calmly and happily in this or that way of life. With regard to the interests of the next life, there is no doubt that multitudes of persons living in one kind of state are lost who would have been saved if they had embraced some other; if, for instance, they had chosen the religious instead of the secular life, or if, instead of entering a religious order, they had elected to marry, and remained in the world. So that, of all the resolutions which a man can make there seems to be none on which the most important of all his affairs more depends than this. For, if the predestination or reprobation of every individual usually has its origin in some one particular act, which, though a solitary one, has given the direction to all his subsequent acts, from what act can we more reasonably believe it to spring

than from the election of a state of life, on which, more than on any other individual and particular act of a man, the whole course of his future life is wont to depend?

II. Consider the vast imprudence which most men are guilty of in this respect: for how many there are who, in matters of far less importance—when, for instance, it is a question which of two articles they shall buy, which of two doctors or lawyers they shall employ, which of two alliances they shall contract, act with all prudence and circumspection, consulting with themselves and others, and making particular inquiries on both sides before deciding on one or the other, yet when they have to choose one of two states in which they are to pass their whole life, an election on which their eternal damnation or salvation so much depends, never deliberate nor make any inquiry whatever, in which of the two they will most have to dread the one or best secure the other, but blindly make their choice, merely because an opportunity of entering into one of these two happens to present itself—an imprudence more strange and blamable than if a man, consumed with thirst, and having before him two vessels of water, one of which he had great reason to suspect was poisoned, were not to take any pains to examine them and discover which was the dangerous and which the safe one, but indifferently to drink the contents of whichever he happened to take hold of. There are others, again, who, although they see that in one of two states their salvation will be easy, and that in the other they will run great risk of being lost, yet prefer the dangerous to the safe state in making their election, and this from the most trivial motives, such as to please their relations, or to promote family interests, or for their own honour or advantage, thinking themselves sufficiently excused by saying that

many persons are saved in the former state, and that they may also be saved in it, without considering the unreasonableness of this excuse, nor how, by making it, they show the little care they have of their eternal welfare. For if two vessels were about to sail out of harbour, the one in good condition, the other old, worn, and rotten, they would not be induced to embark their property on board the latter by the captain's saying he had made the voyage several times, and that it was possible he might make it safely once more; they would reply that the mere possibility was not enough to make them prefer it to what was so much safer; and if they showed prudence in that case, and yet, when their eternal salvation is concerned, are willing to choose a path in which it may possibly, though less surely, be attained, what is this but to prove that their souls are less dear and valuable in their eyes than their worldly goods?

III. Consider, that since the value of everything consists in the relation it bears to our last end, there can be no better rule for choosing well in any matter, than to choose that which most conduces to that last end; and, consequently, that since the last end of man is the eternal salvation of his soul, there can be no wiser rule for any one in the election of his state of life than to consider that the best, and as such to choose it, in which he sees that he will ensure his salvation with the greatest ease, certainty, and increase of merit. This, then, is the one aim to be kept in view when deliberating on this matter, that is to say, not which is the state in which you will most please your relations, benefit your family, be advanced to a more honourable position, and lead a life of greater ease, but which will most help you to save your soul eternally. So that, of two states, the one of which will wonderfully promote these temporal

interests, but somewhat endanger your eternal salvation, and the other will more ensure the latter but at the same time be entirely contrary to the advancement of the former, you should consider it absolutely and beyond a doubt better and wiser to choose the latter than the former. To act differently would be an error as to first principles, namely, taking the means for the last end, nay, preferring them before the last end. And if you ask me how you are to discover which is the state in which you may save your soul most easily, surely, and with the greatest amount of merit, and which, therefore, you ought to consider deserves to be preferred to all others, I answer, that it is the state in which the fewest sins are committed and the most good works done, or, if you desire a mark still more definite, and *à priori*, it is that in which a person has the fewest temptations to evil and the most inducements to good, for we may take it for granted that the man who most refrains from sin and most practises good works is the man who will save his soul most surely and with the greatest amount of merit; and as a rule this is done by the man who has fewest temptations to evil and most inducements to good. To this, then, may be reduced the whole inquiry concerning the state which most conduces to our eternal salvation, and which, therefore, is most deserving of being chosen. It can all be reduced to these two heads, which are naturally connected together: first, to discover which is the state in which, as a rule, the fewest sins are committed and the most good works done, and in which, therefore, you have reason to believe that this would be your case; and, secondly (and this is both the source and the best means of discovering the first point), in what state are to be found the most helps to good and the fewest incitements to evil.

IV. Consider that to these rules, by which the

understanding is instructed how to discern what is the best to choose, must be added, as a second and no less necessary requisite, the good disposition of the will. For when the will is not rightly disposed it is a great hindrance to making a good election, and this in two ways. First, by setting itself in opposition to a right judgment, either by choosing what it sees to be the worst, or by delaying, without any good reason, to choose what it has clearly seen to be the best. Secondly (and this is the commonest way), by perverting the judgment, so as to make it either declare that to be best, and propose it as such, which is not so in reality, but only most suited to the taste of the person, or not discern with sufficient clearness that which is the best, though the least pleasant; according to the words of the Psalmist, "he would not understand that he might do well;"[1] after the example of many heretics whose conversion is hindered solely by some irregular and vicious affection to the goods of this world, which cramps their will and clouds their understanding, so that if their soul were once clear of it, they would very easily discern the Catholic faith to be true, and embrace it as necessary. What, then, in our own case, will be this disposition of the will which [illegible] for making a good election? For my part I [illegible]s required for [illegible]aking a [illegible] this: that the person before se[illegible]tting himself to inquir[illegible] all the states in his power alr[illegible]eady laid down, which of [illegible]y to be embraced, should form [illegible]choose is the most worthy [illegible] a very strong resolution to atta[illegible]a very fervent desire and [illegible] all risks, and to ensure it by all [illegible]in his eternal salvation at [illegible]hat spirit enter upon the discu[illegible] possible means, and in t[illegible] determined, without having re[illegible]ssion of the point to be [illegible]lar states which he has to reje[illegible]gard, in any of the particu[illegible]rences as the one [illegible]ct or choose, to such diffe[illegible]

[1] Psalm xxxv. 4.

being more or less congenial than the other to hi earthly appetites and interests, but only observing the rule of treating it as a means and instrument subordinate to his last end, that is, as affording him greater or less assistance for the attainment of his everlasting salvation. Endeavour, then, to excite in your mind this right resolution, that you will be saved at any cost and in the most certain manner, according to the motives which have been suggested to you in the meditations you have been making, particularly those on the last things and on your last end, and be very sure that the stronger, more lively, and efficacious it is, the better disposed will you be to make a good election of your state of life, that is, to discover readily which of them all is the best, and as promptly to embrace that one which you recognize to be so.

V. Consider that after having done all this, you must go on to the last requisite for a good election, that is, the careful examination of the states among which you have to choose, first observing the good and the bad of each one in itself, and when comparing them one with another, to see in which you will find the most aids and the fewest hindrances to leading a holy life, and concluding, according to the principles already laid down, that if you see fewer sins to be committed, and more acts of virtue performed, that is to say, that the soul can be saved more easily, certainly, and with more abundant merit in one state than in any of the others, you are right in considering it to be absolutely the best and most deserving of your election. Then, in order to avoid confusion, and to conduct this examination with greater precision, it will be well to begin by taking the two most general states, under which are ranged all the others, that is, the religious and the secular states, observing both the hindrances and the aids towards the salvation and perfection of the soul, which

are to be met with in both, and then deciding, by a comparison of the two, which you think will help you in the attainment of your end—that is to say, in which you will be most removed from every kind of sin, and most detached from worldly things; in which you will best be able to practise mortification, humility, charity, to your neighbour, and union with God; in which you will gain the greatest amount of merit, by the diligent and fervent performance of virtuous acts; in a word, in which you will be able to save your soul with the greatest ease, certainty, and advantage. If, after this comparison, you think the secular state the best for you, and therefore the one to be chosen, you should go on to examine and compare in the same manner the two principal states into which it is divided, that is, the ecclesiastical and that of laymen, and if the latter, whether the state of marriage or of celibacy, till you discover the one which you ought decidedly to embrace as the best, and the final conclusion of all the deliberations you have been making on the subject. If, on the other hand, the religious state seems most helpful to your salvation, and therefore more deserving of your choice, you must not be satisfied with that conclusion, as though any one of its different orders would equally serve you as a means to your end; but setting before you some of those which are the most exemplary, the best supplied with virtuous subjects, and in which the special qualities of the regular state shine most brightly, such as the observance of the rule, the perfect equality of community life, retirement from the world, fraternal union among the brethren, and obedience to Superiors, you should consider which of them is best suited to your strength, natural ability, and other personal characteristics both bodily and mental, and in which, therefore, you have reason to think that your health will best bear the strain of the rule to be observed by

all, that a wider field will be opened for the exercise of the talents which you have received from God for the common good, that you will find that special path of perfection towards which you feel yourself attracted both by natural inclination and by grace; that, in short, you will serve God with greater ease, sweetness, perseverance, fervour, and profit; and you should finally choose, as the best and most suited to you, that order which you have found to fulfil all, or the greater part of the above conditions.

Do not let it occur to you to object that, according to the principles here laid down, every one who deliberates on the election of a state of life must of necessity choose religion, as being that which plainly appears more helpful than any other to the interests of eternal salvation, and that therefore every one of the faithful ought, if he would make a prudent resolution, to retire to the cloister, and bind himself by religious vows—a consequence which appears, on the other hand, very hard, and by no means admissible; for by this means there would, in less than a century, be no Christianity, no true religion left in the world: there would remain nothing but a medley of unbelieving sects, of heretics, Jews, Mahometans, and idolaters. Do not, I say, let this objection cross your mind. For although, on the showing of the principles which have been set down, neither you, nor I, nor any one can deny that if the religious state were more profitable to his eternal salvation for everybody, it ought to be chosen in preference to all others by those who act according to true, that is, to Christian and supernatural prudence, it is, nevertheless false that it follows from this, that all the faithful should retire to the cloister, and absurd to talk of there being no trace of Christianity or of true religion left in the world after a few years. There are two reasons for this: first, because in consequence of the

perverse way of life, both as to opinions and practice, which is led by the majority, even among Christians, it is morally impossible that they should all possess the prudence and virtue necessary for so arduous a resolution: "All men take not this word."[2] The life of people in the world would be much better and less perilous than it is at present, and not far inferior to that of religion, if everybody in it had this ardent desire to know, and this strong determination to embrace, at all costs, and in spite of every temporal argument to the contrary, what most conduces to the interests of his everlasting salvation. The second reason is, that even if all Christians were to see that the religious state in some of those orders in which the rule is thoroughly observed, is absolutely the best of all for them, and in consequence should resolve, as far as it rests with them, to embrace it, they would not all be able to put this good will of theirs into practice, in consequence of their failing in some of the conditions necessary for this object; for some would not have the health required for remaining in the order they have chosen, and others would lack the talent and learning, and similar qualities necessary for the consent of the Superiors to their entering the community, particularly if it were already sufficiently supplied with subjects, and had not sufficient funds for maintaining a greater number; and because of these reasons a great many would be obliged to remain in the world, in spite of their having made choice of the religious life. But even supposing that all Christians, besides their own resolution of consecrating themselves to God in some order, were in possession also of everything required both on their side and that of the order for admission into it, even granting this they would not all enter religion. For, as this could not happen without that dis-

[2] St. Matt. xix. 11.

order resulting which you suggested, that is to say, that in a few years the Christian and Catholic Church would cease to exist in the world, the majority of that great multitude thronging round the gates of the cloister, that is, as many as were required for maintaining and propagating Christianity in the world, would be excluded, out of regard to the public good, by the Superiors of the religious orders, and still more by the Sovereign Pontiff. Seeing, then, that in order to make a wise election it is plainly necessary to be guided by the principles laid down in the third point, and also that, not even by an imaginary and fanciful hypothesis, can the doing of this be any prejudice to the public good, it follows that according to those principles you should consider nothing in the different states amongst which you are able to choose, but which of them all will most promote your eternal interests; and if you think that the state of religion is that one, and you are not hindered by any insuperable obstacle from embracing it, you ought to choose it resolutely and promptly as the best of all.

But perhaps you will say that in spite of your acknowledging this to be the case, you are still in some doubt as to whether God calls you to that state, because, notwithstanding this recognition of its spiritual advantages, you feel in your will repugnance and aversion rather than alacrity and inclination to choose it. Such a doubt is utterly vain and irrational, as much so as if you were to doubt that God required of you an act of mortification or charity because, although you acknowledge that you would greatly please Him by performing it, you feel unwilling rather than disposed to perform it. In order the better to understand this, you should observe that God calls men to do right in two ways, one of which is more general and frequent, when, namely, they perceive by the clear light of faith

the supernatural excellence and utility of some act of virtue; the other is more special and less obvious, that is, when He gives, in addition to this recognition, a strong and sweet inclination of the will towards it. It cannot be denied that the last of these two ways is the greater favour from God, both because it renders the good act easier, and because it is thus that He often calls those to whom He sees that, for some reason peculiar to themselves, it will be especially profitable to do the thing to which they are called, and especially dangerous to neglect it. From which it follows that a man who does not correspond to these more especial calls has greater reason to fear some spiritual injury and punishment, than if he had not corresponded merely to the general and frequent ones, because he is guilty of ingratitude for a greater favour from God, and is neglecting to do a thing which is particularly necessary for him. But notwithstanding this, I still say that it is quite certain that the first kind of incitement to do right, which consists merely in knowing that it is right, ought to be accounted a very real vocation from God, that is a declaration of what He desires us to do, and it is quite sufficient by itself, because whoever follows it is sure of following God, and of acting according to His good pleasure. For it is not possible that there can be any act, absolutely good, holy, and better, *ipsa quam non ipsa*, to which God does not invite and exhort every one who recognizes it to be so, as to a thing pleasing to Him; a point which is well expressed by St. Paul when writing to the Thessalonians, and in them to all of us, he said: "This is the will of God, your sanctification."[2] Indeed, so true is this, that the whole certainty of the second and more special vocation consists not so much in what is peculiar to itself, namely, the affectionate inclination of

[2] 1 Thess. iv. 3.

the will, as in what it has in common with the first, namely, the intellectual recognition that it is right. So that though comparing together their respective characteristics, and considering each separately by itself, the second must always be accounted greater than the first, yet if a man were to see that one of two virtuous objects was more conducive to his spiritual profit, but that he was more inclined to choose the other, he should take that intellectual recognition as a surer sign of his being called by God to choose the former, than the inclination of his affection that he was called to the latter. And this I say to convince you that for a man to be rightly and certainly called by God to the state of religion, it is enough that he should simply recognize that he will find in it greater aids in serving God and saving his soul, even though that recognition should not be accompanied by any special inclination to that state—nay, even though it should be combined with a sensible repugnance and aversion to it. I will add, that he who applies himself to the consideration of this matter with the dispositions mentioned in the fourth point, that is, with a fervent will and firm resolution to save his soul with the greatest possible certainty and profit, will hardly ever find that his affections do not tend towards that state which he sees to be the means most conducive to that end, or that he is not impelled to make choice of it by a powerful inclination and eagerness at least of the superior part of his soul.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTICAL SELF-REFORMATION.

Which may be made use of during the time of the Exercises for the greater profit of the soul.

The Spiritual Exercises, in order to be thoroughly and lastingly fruitful, ought not to stop at the mere consideration of the great universal truths, but to their particular and practical consequences, that is to say, to a solid reformation and amendment of life. I have therefore thought it advisable to add to the meditations given above some *riforme*, or practical considerations, both on those ills of the soul which it is most necessary to avoid, and on those virtues with which it is of most importance to store it. In this way a person who thoroughly desires to amend his life may, by taking one of these considerations a day, both remove from his soul what he sees to be injurious to it, and implant in it what he sees is wanted. I say one a day, for it is not my intention that those which exceed the number of days occupied by the Exercises, that is to say, that those which follow the first eight, should be used as well as the preceding ones, without omitting any. But they are added, as I have said in the Preface, in order that if any one should find the earlier considerations unsuited to his particular frame of mind, he may find matter in the later ones which he can make use of with greater pleasure and profit.

FIRST CONSIDERATION.

On overcoming human respect.

SUMMARY.

I. In what a vicious and dangerous human respect consists.
II. Reasons for not allowing it ever to have a part in our actions.
III. The means which will help us in this matter.
IV. Examination of the disorders we have formerly committed in this respect, and of the way to correct them in future.

I. As the foundation of this Exercise, settle with yourself what human respect is; that is to say, that it consists in an excessive and irregular dependence, as affecting our actions, on the vain judgments, tastes, and maxims of men, so that through regard to them we either neglect doing what we ought, such as correcting a sinner, turning away our eyes from dangerous objects, showing patience and meekness towards those who injure us, and practising openly, when necessity requires it, any other virtue; or else that we do what we ought not, letting ourselves be induced by companions to go to balls, theatres, and dangerous assemblies, allowing ourselves to enter into unlawful conversations, and approving wrong opinions in others. Every day we see these and other faults of the same sort committed by many persons, even against their will, who are, as it were, forced into them merely by the fear that if they acted differently they would be despised and laughed at as exaggerated, scrupulous, melancholy, and weak-minded persons.

II. Set before you, and deliberately consider the reasons we have for not yielding to this respect and fear of men when they try to seduce us from what is right or urge us to what is wrong. These are the four principal: first, because by accustoming himself to follow these vicious impulses, a man contracts a sort of obligation to yield to them, even when by doing so he must sin mortally, nay, more, even die in sin, and plunge into hell with his eyes open, as is clearly shown by the example of many who, when mortally wounded in a duel, although they see themselves on the brink of that terrible abyss, and know certainly that if they die in their present evil state they must infallibly fall into it, yet choose to suffer, together with the temporal death of the body, the everlasting death of the soul, rather than give a seeming and imaginary sign of cowardice, by asking their life of their adversary. And let no one excuse himself by saying that his yielding *hic et nunc* to human respect is a small evil, since the good that he leaves undone is a mere work of supererogation, and the evil that he commits is only a venial sin. Let him be very sure that besides that light evil, each such occasion is a fresh knot, by which he binds himself more tightly to the habit of acting according to the vicious will of others, rather than by the dictates of his own conscience, and it cannot be said how dangerous, violent, and tyrannical this habit is, which may drag him, without his being able to resist it, to every kind of enormous sin, and even to the everlasting perdition of his soul. The second reason is that it shows great baseness of mind for one who is born free, and lord over himself, to be willing without any necessity or advantage voluntarily to subject himself to another, and to live not according to his own judgment, but according to that of the other, never daring to contradict him, but allowing himself to be forced, as a

slave, to do even that which he sees to be very prejudicial to himself, and which he can, therefore, only do unwillingly, and by compulsion. Is not this disgraceful baseness of mind, unworthy of a noble spirit? And who is that other, that you should live as he pleases rather than as you please? Why should you be subject to him rather than he to you, who obliges you to be his servant without any advantage, nay, with great loss to yourself, when you might so much more profitably be free? Do not part with the sovereignty over yourself, than which there is nothing sweeter, dearer, or more honourable to a man. Let others say what they please, do you act as you judge best. The third reason is that those, the fear of whose judgments and speeches is able to seduce you from what is right, or to drive you to what is wrong, are, when rightly appreciated, a base rabble of foolish and ignorant persons; for it is not possible that any wise or prudent man should despise you for living aright, and doing your duty. What folly then is yours, to treat them with so much respect, and to make so much account of what they think or say about you! All the more, because, if they laugh at you for doing right, God and the angels, and all wise men on earth besides, will applaud you, whereas they could not but despise you if you went astray from the path of duty out of regard to those empty-headed persons. For to yield to them, and to be influenced by their words, would be the same thing as if you were to see some drunken men stark naked in the public square, and that when you heard them laugh at you for being clothed, you were to strip yourself like them in order to avoid their absurd mockery, without any regard to the reasonable contempt that your indecent state would deservedly bring on you from all sane and sober men. The fourth and last reason is that the opinion and contempt of men, being

things quite external to you, have no power to hurt a hair of your head, or to do you the very smallest harm; whereas by grievously offending God through fear of men, you cannot but at once incur the death of your soul. If, on the other hand, by doing your duty you were to involve yourself in some real and great evil from the anger of some powerful person which you had thereby incurred, what, after all, would that be in comparison with the punishments which you would bring on yourself by failing in your duty, from the retributive justice of God?—"Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell."[1] What man was ever so foolish as to leap into the fire to avoid the pungency of the smoke, or to take refuge in a dragon's cave from fear of a little dog that was barking behind him? And if it would be the choice of a madman to provoke the anger of an enemy, omnipotent as God, for the sake of avoiding that of men, even though they should threaten him with death; how much more insane is it when the worst to be feared from them is after all no more than a word, a grimace, a contemptuous gesture?

III. The next thing is to provide the means by which you may obtain an easy victory over human respect. These are, besides rightly appreciating the force and habitually cherishing the remembrance of the former reasons, the two following: first, to proclaim yourself openly as a man of good conscience and a faithful servant of God, and from time to time to express pious sentiments in your conversation, and that not timidly and hesitatingly, but with decision, calmness, and boldness, as being a thing that no one could possibly think strange among Christians any more than it would be for soldiers to talk of feats of arms and victories. And

[1] St. Matt. x. 28.

you should gain the habit of doing this, especially at the beginning of your intercourse with any one, so that being made aware of your opinions by this means, he may not afterwards venture to oppose your virtuous behaviour, but that, instead of your being kept back from what is right through fear and respect for him, he may be deterred from evil by shame and respect for you. And this is a most important caution; for if bad men get the upper hand of you, and draw you into following their principles as they please once or twice, the difficulty of resisting them on subsequent occasions will be redoubled, and they will have greater liberty and ground for deriding you when you would oppose their evil maxims and example. Whereas, on the contrary, by acting courageously on the first occasions, you will make yourself superior to them, and will almost have conquered for ever all vain respect of them. Another great help to this, is not to be satisfied with a merely defensive resistance in contending with them, but to go on to play the part of a bold assailant, not only refusing to abandon the practice of Christian virtue because one of your companions shows that he considers it eccentricity, scrupulosity, womanish weakness and superstition, but inviting, and, as it were, compelling him with friendly freedom and authority to act in the same way. To take an instance: Suppose that he tries to dissuade you from going to pray in some church, take him boldly by the hand, as if to draw him after you, and say, "Call it weakness or what you please, my good fellow, you must come with me if you are my friend; you must just practise patience, and fall in with the ways of those in whose company you may happen to be." The second means is if, by frequently yielding to a person, you have given him a hold over you, so that you feel it will be exceedingly difficult for you to resist him manfully on other occasions, to avoid his

company as much as possible, although it would be a more efficacious remedy to arm yourself with Christian courage, and purposely to set yourself to converse with him. For by that means, after two or three victories, you would feel the sweetness of your freedom, escape from that disgraceful servitude, and regain the power which you had lost, of acting boldly as you think best.

IV. As the conclusion of the whole exercise, examine whether you fail in this matter, and if so, to what extent, and in what manner; then, considering by the light of the reasons adduced to the contrary, how disgraceful this is, resolve to correct it seriously by the means which have been proposed as remedies.

SECOND CONSIDERATION.

Concerning the contempt of earthly goods, riches, power, glory, and pleasures.

SUMMARY.

I. How important it is to despise these goods.
II. The reasons there are for despising them.
III. In what acts the perfect contempt of them exists.
IV. The express and formal exercise of these acts.

I. Consider the importance of banishing from your mind all vain esteem, and implanting in it a profound contempt, of earthly goods. For if you will but go over, one by one, all the sins, both mortal and venial, with which men's lives are filled, all the obstacles which check or delay their progress in spiritual things, all the cares, anxieties, and troubles which disturb our souls, everything, in short, which detaches us from God and makes us forget our last end, you will see that they have no other source than an irregular affection for the goods of the present life, and that this affection springs from nothing but from a vain and excessive estimation of these goods. For it is not possible that a man should love anything, except because he considers it good, or that he should love it much, except because he considers it a great good. Whence it follows, that in the same degree that you desire to remedy all these evils which have been enumerated, you ought to be anxious to root out of your mind this estimation of earthly goods; for when once you have destroyed that which is their only root they will all immediately cease to exist. Let this, then, be your first step, namely, to

stir yourself up, by the importance of correcting this evil, to an efficacious desire and resolution of getting rid, for the future, of that vain esteem of earthly goods which has grown up in your mind from your earliest years, either from their deceitful appearance or from the perverted judgments and example of the persons with whom you live, that is, of almost the whole human race; so that as, in past time, you blindly valued them as goods, and very considerable goods, you may in future form a wiser opinion, and despise them either as goods of very trifling value, or in no real sense goods at all.

II. Go on to use the means for producing this contempt of them in your mind, that is, to consider the reasons which prove beyond a doubt that there is no true and solid goodness in them. There are two of these reasons: the first is founded on their utter inaptitude to our last end. For it is a point of absolute certainty that nothing can be considered good by its possessor, except just so far as it disposes and assists him towards the attainment of his last end. If you were to offer a royal sceptre instead of a pen to a man who was in urgent need of writing, and desired nothing else, he would undoubtedly refuse it as being a thing certainly more magnificent, but not better, nay, not good in any way in his eyes, because entirely useless for his purpose and requirement, that of writing. In the same way you would judge as to what a runner or lackey would do if he were offered a very elegant, gay, and handsome pair of shoes, which were too small and uncomfortable; it is evident that he could not consider them good for him, because they would be unfavourable to his swiftness in running, that is, to the thing which is his particular end and business. Having settled this point, let us see whether honours, riches, pleasures, and other such earthly goods are of assistance to man in

obtaining his last end, that is to say, his eternal beatitude. It is quite clear that they do not help him by their own nature, but rather are a considerable hindrance to him in this matter, as our Lord has expressly asserted in many passages of the Gospel, and as the experience of every one every day proves. We are obliged, then, to come to the conclusion that these things may indeed be called honourable, agreeable to the senses, what you please; but no more good for us than a royal sceptre can be called good for a man who wants to write, or a pair of young ladies' shoes for one who is about to run a race. What, then, you will say, is the reason that, in spite of so plain a consequence, they nevertheless consider these things as goods, and goods of the greatest value? I reply that the reason is that instead of holding their everlasting beatitude to be their last end, they make new ends for themselves, at least negatively, of what are not really so, pleasure and honour. Hence, when they see that power and wealth are means conducive to the attainment of these things, they account power and wealth to be goods, although in reality they are not so, any more than pleasure and honour are really their end, but only falsely assumed to be so. If they judged aright, they would acknowledge nothing as their last end, that is, as an object desirable in and for itself, but everlasting beatitude; and everything else, such as pleasure, riches, honour, and power, would be regarded by them merely as means, that is, as objects not desirable in themselves, but only with regard to everlasting beatitude; and thus it would be impossible for them, having recognized their inutility to this their only end, to continue to think and call them goods.

The second reason, which is equally clear and undeniable, is drawn from the very low estimation in which pleasures, riches, honours, and all earthly goods

whatsoever are held by God, for He calls those wretched who have an abundance of these things: "Woe to you that are rich . . . woe to you that now laugh;"[1] and He exhorts His friends to abandon them: "He who doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be My disciple;"[2] and the man whom He will honour and exalt in His kingdom is not he who possesses these things on earth, but rather he who despises and renounces them. Certainly He would not have made either of these declarations if He held such things in great account, or if He esteemed them to be goods even of the slightest value. Since, therefore, God's judgment is the only infallible standard of every right judgment, and since things cannot be other than they are regarded by Him, it follows, as a manifest consequence, that the goods of this life, being despised by Him, are in reality despicable, although the whole world should be of a different opinion, and can only be valued by any one through a delusion and mistake. Besides, even if they possessed any real goodness (which is seen to be false from the above two evident reasons), yet in comparison with the supernatural goods of sanctifying grace and heavenly glory it would only be very little indeed, and not worthy of being greatly valued by one who is capable of the others; just as the acquisition of a penny, being so very small a thing compared to the riches of Solomon, could not be much thought of or regarded as a considerable good by that King.

III. Having seen that it is very useful to despise the goods of this world—and on the other hand that to do so cannot be any great difficulty, because the understanding is obliged, by reasons so manifest, to acknowledge them to be objects of either very trifling value, or none at all, and therefore unworthy of being held in

[1] St. Luke vi. 24, 25. [2] St. Luke xiv. 33.

any but the lowest estimation—you should, before coming to the practice of this due contempt of them settle in what acts and sentiments it should consist; and these are the four following. First, not to esteem him happy who possesses a great abundance of these goods, nor to think him deserving of any admiration or envy on those grounds, or a bit greater then one who is quite without them. Secondly, not to feel any sadness or trouble whatever at being entirely destitute of them or very scantily provided with them. Thirdly, not to set your heart and affections on anxiously desiring to acquire them. Fourthly, if you should happen to have or to gain an abundance of these things, not to rejoice or be proud of it, any more than if you owned or had gained a great heap of sand. These, I say, should be your sentiments concerning worldly goods if you really and truly despise them, since this is the way in which everybody thinks and feels about things which he considers of no account. This may be seen by taking as an example something else which you profess to think slightingly of, such as the calling of a chimney-sweep. Do you think him fortunate who follows it and is more distinguished in it than others, and do you regard him with admiration and envy? Certainly not, because no one is thought fortunate and worth admiring and envying for possessing what is valueless. Do you feel sad because you do not know the business, because you do not follow it, because you do not excel in it? Of course not; it is not possible for any one to be troubled at not having what he despises. Do you give much thought, anxiety, and care to learn and get on in that calling? The answer is the same; we are only anxious and eager about things which we think highly of. Would you be full of joy and pride if any extraordinary accident obliged you to practise it? On the contrary, you

would be grieved and ashamed at it. Keep this example, therefore, in mind, and by it regulate your value of temporal goods, being very certain that if you despise them as you ought, you will be no more impressed by hearing that such a person is a famous general or a powerful sovereign, than by hearing that he is an excellent chimney-sweep; and on the other hand, that if you feel differently on hearing these two things, you do not hold earthly goods in that low and mean estimation in which they should be held by those who judge rightly, according to the reasons already adduced.

IV. Having thus settled the acts proper to the due contempt of temporal goods, you should, in the last place, enter upon the express and formal exercise of these in reference to each of those four principal kinds specified in the title of this Consideration. To begin with riches: imagine a nobleman, vaunted by common report as the most opulent in the world; suppose him to possess five hundred thousand crowns a year, besides country seats, palaces, servants, with a stud and wardrobe and all the rest of the accessories suitable to so great a fortune. What is the world's opinion of him? That he is supremely happy! but pause before you believe it and follow its judgment. For you should first consider what this worldly wealth is in comparison with the perfect plenitude of all good things that can be desired, which the Blessed enjoy in God eternally. And since it is evident that, compared with this, all his wealth is far less than the possessions of some poor artisan are in comparison with his own, you ought not to value it more highly; but, just as you would laugh at the exclamation if you heard any one say, "Oh, how happy that man is!" when speaking of the artisan, so, however often men of the world say the same of that Crœsus, you should not in the least be induced to

believe it, but rather should deride the folly and blindness of those who form such a judgment. Again: of what use are his five hundred thousand crowns for the eternal salvation of his soul, and what account does God make of them? It is quite certain that all this great wealth neither promotes his salvation nor makes him more in God's sight than any beggar; and, according to the principles that have been laid down, it is equally certain that as all those riches in no way help their possessor towards the attainment of his last end, and are held in no esteem by God, so, too, they should not be in the least valued by those who would form a right judgment; nay, rather they should be despised, not only as possessing no special goodness, but as quite without any. This, then, is the first act you have to make concerning them—to say to yourself, "The possession of an income of five hundred thousand crowns is no more valuable than that of five hundred thousand grains of sand; for reason and faith clearly prove that there is no more real good in having the former than the latter." Then, having conceived this general contempt of riches, go on to make concerning them the four particular acts which we have seen to be proper to one who despises anything; adding interiorly, but with a strong, serious, and settled feeling of the heart, "Since, then, this truth appears most certain to me, I will henceforth esteem that man no happier than myself or any other artisan, however great may be his wealth, and I will no more envy him for his coffers full of gold than I should if they were full of sand; neither will I ever again be troubled at not having more means than are sufficient for a scanty subsistence, or cherish in my heart any anxious desire of increasing them; and if by any chance I should happen to double them, I will not think that I have gained anything that will make my life happier or more honourable than it is now." Thes

are the sentiments, I say, which you should strive in good earnest to entertain respecting riches, and you may be very sure that if you find a difficulty in this, and utter them as it were by compulsion and with your lips only, you have not that low estimate of riches which God has, and that therefore you are living under a delusion concerning them, and that your judgment of them is distorted, like that of one who is blind, ignorant, or a fool. You must do the same about worldly power as about riches; and imagine this, too, in the highest degree to which man can attain, as, for example, that of a sovereign superior to all others in extent of dominion, in amplitude of revenue, in the strength of his armies. Let him be, as it were, the arbiter of hnman destinies, so that no other prince would venture to provoke his anger, but that all fear and reverence him, and vie with one another in winning his favour. What do you think about him? Judging by appearances, and according to common opinion, you will consider him extremely happy, and almost a god upon earth. But if you will only reflect how very little all that power of his is when compared with the supernatural goods of Divine grace, and that it helps him in no degree to attain his last end, and makes him no more honourable in the sight of God than any wretched slave, you will be forced to acknowledge that what he possesses is nothing really great or valuable, nay, that a galley-slave chained to the oar, if he possesses but one degree more of Divine grace than he does, is much more exalted, happy, and honourable. Hence you should infer, that if a power so highly applauded and all but superhuman has nothing good or valuable about it, much less can such be the case with regard to one that is inferior and moderate, such as that of an ordinary prince or nobleman, who is more influential than the rest in your country. You have then to examine whether your sentiments concerning

this kind of worldly distinction of whatever degree, whether eminent, or the very highest possible, are such as you are in the habit of entertaining with regard to things which are in their nature contemptible, and which you despise; as, for example, with regard to the occupation of a chimney-sweep. If you find that your feelings and dispositions are not the same in both cases, you may be sure that your ideas on this subject also are distorted, and you must set about correcting them by the principles already laid down, and never rest till you have arrived at regarding the most powerful personage possible in the same way as you would regard the principal chimney-sweep of the town you live in; that is, not to consider him any happier, more honourable or enviable than the latter, not to be more troubled at the want of his power than you are at not knowing the trade of the other; and lastly, not to covet the former more, or be more pleased if you should chance to obtain it, than you covet the latter, or would be pleased at excelling in it.

Having done this, go on in the same way to despise every kind of worldly honour and glory, and for this purpose picture to your imagination some captain who has fought fifty pitched battles with very powerful and warlike enemies, in which he has always defeated their troops and gained a signal victory, so that his name has been borne in triumph to all parts of the world and everywhere greeted with extraordinary admiration; or else some literary man of wonderful talent and unparalleled learning, who is consulted from distant countries, lauded as the Phœnix of his age, and pointed out wherever he goes as a superhuman prodigy. It may easily happen that at first sight the glory of these persons may dazzle you, as though it were a great good, worthy of being greatly admired and coveted. But if you call to mind that their renown is utterly

worthless in God's eyes, and that it in no way conduces to their everlasting beatitude, you will perceive that there is no good reason for preferring them on that account to the meanest ploughman; nay, that there is the greatest reason for esteeming them less than him, if he possesses one degree more of sanctifying grace than they do. Regard them, therefore, not by the light of the senses, nor according to the esteem in which they are held by the ignorant people, but according to the true and infallible rules of the eternal truths, which will show you that all their glory is a very small good, nay, none at all; and consider, in consequence, that they are no happier for all their distinctions than if they possessed none whatever, and that you are no less happy without them than you would be if they all belonged to you in equal measure.

You now come to the last thing which you have to exercise yourself in despising by acts of the same kind, namely, all immoderate abundance of the pleasures which are to be enjoyed in the world, such as would be the case of a man who spent his life in constantly amusing himself with hunting, play, assemblies, music, banquets, festivities, and everything else gratifying to the senses, and we will suppose that the sweetness of this state of perfect and perpetual enjoyment is never disturbed by sickness or the slightest annoyance or contrary accident. Then remind yourself that this life, fair and delightful as it may seem, yet having nothing whatever to do with the beatitude so far surpassing it which God has prepared for you in heaven, and not being of the slightest help to you in attaining that blessed end, being, moreover, esteemed of no value by God, and even most commonly granted to those who are enemies and rebels to Him, just as we throw a bone that has been picked to the dogs, does not deserve that you should regard it as a thing of the

slightest worth or excellence. And then you must consider it with the same sentiments of thorough contempt which you have already conceived and expressed for the riches, power, and glory of the world, declaring that it is, in your opinion, the same thing to possess it as to be without it, and that therefore you will never condescend to fix your desires on it, as though the possession of it to satiety were a great good, or a good in any sense, or the deprivation of it a great evil, or an evil in any sense. In conclusion, you should not be satisfied or leave this exercise till these temporal goods begin to be seen by you, not under the false appearance by which most men are allured to admire, praise, and desire them, as though they were the height of human felicity; but according to the certain principles of the faith, by the light of which they are shown to be objects of very little, nay, of no value at all: and so, being convinced beyond a doubt of their worthlessness, you should make no difference between having and not having them, and consider the man who possesses them in abundance to be no more fortunate, estimable, or deserving of envy than another who is entirely destitute of them; and thus you will be kept both from all grief at being without them and from all eagerness to obtain them.

THIRD CONSIDERATION.

On the way of preserving ourselves, as far as possible, from ever committing mortal sin.

SUMMARY.

I. How right and necessary it is to have a strong and habitual resolution never to commit mortal sin, and what powerful motives we have for making it.

II. That to have this resolution, and in conformity with it to pass the whole of life free from mortal sin, is not only possible, but easy in every state to all those who will make use of the necessary means for doing so.

III. What these means are.

I. You must first lay down as a certain principle that the most solid fruit of the Spiritual Exercises, the fruit indeed, without which all the rest would be of very little value, or of none at all, is to arm you in the most efficacious manner possible against mortal sin, and at the same time to form a right idea of its incomparable malice, both on account of the very grievous injury it occasions to ourselves, and the detestable offence which is done by it to God. The consequence of this must be your hating and detesting it more than any other evil, and therefore being no less determined never to be guilty of so disgraceful an enormity and so horrible a crime, than you are never to murder your father or to fling yourself headlong from the top of a tower; and even going so far as to consider it an imaginary and almost impossible case that you should ever commit a folly and wickedness so contrary to all reason: "How can I do this wicked thing, and sin

against my God?"[1] Having settled this point, in order to stir up or confirm in yourself these just sentiments, call to mind the considerations you have already made on the pernicious effects and evil qualities of mortal sin, both with regard to the soul, which it renders the enemy of God and condemns to hell, holding it suspended by a very slender thread over that abyss of eternal misery, and in imminent and evident danger of falling into it every moment, and also with regard to God since it causes us grievously to offend a Master Who deserves both infinite reverence for His incomprehensible Majesty, and love as infinite for the unspeakable mercy He has shown us, so that if we were to consume and spend a thousand lives in His service it would be but a little thing. Go back, I say, to these two points, and dwell upon them, and then see whether, whenever you sin, you do not commit as wicked an action as it would be, from a human point of view, to kill your father, and incur as great an evil as if you threw yourself headlong from a tower; and whether you can possibly think that to be guilty of it is less incredible and less contrary to your duty than to throw yourself from such a height or to stain yourself with the guilt of parricide.

II. Convince yourself, as of a thing absolutely certain, that frail as is our nature and strong as are the temptations of the devil, and dangerous as are the occasions of sin in which we are from time to time necessarily placed, still it is possible for every one, even living in the world and following any honest calling soever, to keep, by the Divine assistance, from all sin and to persevere in the grace of God till his death. For there is no state or profession in life in which there have not been persons even of great sanctity, and who are honoured as such by the public

[1] Genesis xxxix. 9.

worship of the Church, neither are there wanting numerous instances of persons who have passed their lives without ever sinning grievously, even in the most dangerous paths of the world, in the vigour of age, and possessed of abundant worldly means. So that those persons make an idle excuse who, when they are reproved for their frequent falls and relapses into sin, throw the blame on their life in the world, and on the calling they follow in it, saying that it presents so many temptations to evil and distractions from good that it is extremely difficult, and even morally impossible to keep themselves free from all mortal sin. And if it were really impossible to keep God's laws and to avoid all grievous sin in the world, it would follow, since we are all strictly bound to avoid every proximate occasion of sinning, that such a man is equally, nay far more bound to retire from the world, which on his own showing is so dangerous that it keeps him not merely in a proximate occasion but actually under a moral necessity of sinning. But this alleged impossibility of leading a good life in the world is false, and if there are persons there who really find it to be the case, the reason is not in the necessary conditions of the state in which they are living, but in their excessive neglect in not availing themselves of the means and precautions requisite for the avoiding of sin. For, if they made use of them, they would find it not merely possible, but easy, to spend their whole lives in the grace of God: as is actually the case with persons who are spiritual, and anxious about the concerns of their souls, and who, so far from considering this an impossible thing, and finding it an exceeding difficulty, regard the contrary as a monstrous insanity, and are struck with astonishment and unable to understand that there should be found a single man who can be induced by any possible motive to sin and offend God grievously.

You say that the danger of sinning and the difficulty of preserving innocence are greater in the world than in religion. But that is the same thing as to say that those who live in the world stand in greater need of watchfulness and precautions and aids than those who have retired to the cloister. How is it, then, that while religious, though they need them less, practise so many penances, meditations, and other similar means of abiding in the grace of God, you, who by reason of your state being less perfect, are in greater want of these helps, take no trouble about using them? How is it, that while they do not venture to expose themselves to any dangerous occasions, but avoid them all as much as possible, you, who complain of living in the midst of them, instead of shunning them to the extent of your power, put yourself voluntarily in the way of them, and as though unavoidable ones were not enough, go purposely in search of others? You are in a situation so dangerous that all the precautions in use among religious would hardly be sufficient to keep you from falling, and yet you stay there so carelessly, that if you lived in the safest cloistered life with as little attention it would be a great miracle if you did not fall. Ah! the dangers of your position are no excuse for your falls, as though it were impossible to avoid them, but they serve to render still more culpable the negligence by which you yourself make your escape impossible. For whereas the greater the perils in the midst of which you live, the greater should be your care to avoid occasions of evil, to mortify your senses, to meditate on the eternal truths, and to have recourse to God, you nevertheless neglect all these means of safety as though you were living secure from every risk.

III. Settle with yourself some of those antidotes which are of force to prevent your relapsing into sin

for the future; and of these I subjoin six, of which three are negative and three positive. First, to avoid as far as possible the occasions which usually tempt persons to sin, such as looking at dangerous objects, reading bad books, frequenting balls, theatres, and such like scenes of dissipation, listening to sweet songs and alluring voices, and conversing with persons of the opposite sex; or, if that is necessary, holding intercourse with them without the requisite preservatives and caution, such as care that a third person should be always present, avoiding all familiarity and expression of particular affection, not looking them in the face, still less touching them even in such an innocent manner as taking them by the hand. All the saints strictly observed this first means. If persons in the world neglect it, they cannot afterwards complain that they find it difficult, and even morally impossible, to live without sin. I do not deny the impossibility, and I do not wonder at it; but I say that they have deliberately made it for themselves, for that they might, had they chosen, and may, if they choose, be free from it. Secondly, to avoid altogether the friendship and still more the society, of persons who are licentious, dissolute, and without the fear of God, as you would that of people with the plague, and with whom it is impossible to live either without quarrels and disturbance, or else without remorse of conscience and offending God. And if there are motives of duty which do not allow of your avoiding intercourse with them, be careful, at all events, not to approve, either by words, or by smiling silently, any of their speeches which breathe impurity, or injure the character of their neighbour, or in any way are out of harmony with the dictates of Christian piety: but if they are persons whose age or position forbids your silencing them, you should look grave, and show

that your presence is against your will, and try to turn the conversation to better subjects. If they are your inferiors, or even equals in age and position, you should plainly reprove them, and show them how unbecoming such expressions are. Thirdly, beware of all excessive indulgence of the body, never sleeping or lying in bed *ad satietatem*, nor beyond a just moderation, nor choosing the most delicate wines and exquisite dishes at table, not eating too much, nor greedily, and lingering over the taste of them, in short, not allowing the flesh every extraordinary and unnecessary gratification and comfort which it desires, but obliging it to be contented with reasonable treatment, and now and then to feel something of the severity of fasting, penance, discipline, and hair-shirts, so as to chastise it in some degree without injury to the health; since, when treated too tenderly, it becomes extremely insolent, audacious, and impetuous in its desires, and cannot endure to be denied in anything. So true is this, that it would be an unheard of miracle if any one who had been weak in gratifying all its lawful tastes were inexorably to refuse it everything unlawful. Fourthly, every morning, as soon as you rise from bed, throw yourself on your knees before God, acknowledging Him as your Sovereign Lord, calling to mind the strict obligation you are under to serve Him, with perfect fidelity, and resolving most firmly that you will not offend Him that day, for any consideration. "Shall not my soul be subject to God?"[2] "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice."[3] And to this end it will be useful to give a rapid glance at this time over the sins into which you have previously fallen, and which you will be in the occasions of falling into that day, on account of the things you will have to do, the places you will be in, and the persons with whom you

[2] Psalm lxi. 2. [3] Psalm cxviii. 106.

will converse, applying the general good resolution which you began by making, to those sins in particular; and this you should repeat many times in the course of the day as an ejaculatory prayer, especially when you are in danger and occasions of sinning. Fifthly, often to ask of God, with humility, confidence, and fervour, that He will deign to keep you from mortal sin. I say, often: that is, many times a day, first, early in the morning, and afterwards, from time to time, by short but fervent prayers, particularly in temptation and moments of danger. And I add these three conditions to be observed when you have recourse to God in this way: humility, because you should acknowledge and declare that your own strength is in no way of itself sufficient for the result you desire; confidence, because He has made a promise which cannot be broken, to hear those who thus seek His help; and lastly, fervour, because it is not proper that a grace, so important should be asked for coldly. Sixthly, live like a Christian, and one who believes in another life: and it belongs to such a life to spend a short time in prayer, first as soon as you rise in the morning, and in the evening before you go to bed; secondly, observe some regular practices of devotion every day, such as visiting some church, hearing Mass devoutly, reading some spiritual book, reciting the Rosary or our Lady's Office; thirdly, live as one desirous, not merely to be saved, but to love and serve God beyond what is necessary for this, to avoid even lesser sins, and to lay up a store of merit for the next life by the practice of acts of virtue; fourthly and lastly (and I cannot conceive any one who has made the Spiritual Exercises not taking this up as his invariable rule) frequent the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist every week, and choose a wise and holy confessor for the firm guidance of your conscience.

Although I think that these six means may be easily employed by every one, and that they are enough to preserve from mortal sin all his life any man who will do so, even one living in the world, and following any honest calling, yet if some one should find that the peculiar difficulties of his profession, or the general distraction of life in the world make it very hard for him to put them in practice, so that, in spite of the resolution to do so which he made during the Exercises, he sees that as time goes on he neglects them from weakness, and so falls from time to time into his former sins, and after having tried for one year, and then another, there seems no hope of his succeeding better in future; if, I say, there would be such a man, I should advise him, by reason of his individual weakness, as a new and more powerful remedy, to withdraw immediately from that profession, and even from the secular state, and to seek a manner of life which is safer for him, namely, some religious order of strict and exemplary observance. For as these six means are practised in religion with great exactness, and that not by particular choice, but by obligation and common use, it will be easy for him too to practise them under the same conditions, and by them to keep himself all his life free from all mortal sin. And I say, further, that every such person ought, even should no one else exhort him to do so, to resolve on taking this step, by himself, as being better indeed for all, but necessary for him, and that if he does not do this, he shows plainly that he has neither that serious desire and strong will to save his soul, which every prudent man should have concerning so prudent a matter, nor that abhorrence of sin, *super omnia*, which we have already seen to be due to its unparalleled malice. I repeat that, in the first place, he shows that he has not the proper desire of his eternal salvation: for although it

is certain that every one may be saved in any state, it is also certain that very many persons will be lost from continuing to live in the world, who would have been saved if they had retired into some strict religious order. And that man has great reason to fear that he belongs to this number and class who finds that, because of his individual weakness, he cannot remain long without committing mortal sin. Therefore, if when it is in his power to retire to a safer state, he still remains where his eternal salvation runs especial risk, he gives a very clear proof that he is neglecting what is safer, and that, therefore, he has not the anxiety he ought to have about so supremely important a matter. And also, as I added, he shows just as plainly that he does not, as he ought, hate and abhor sin beyond all other evils; for, supposing him to have come to Rome to better his fortunes, and to have found the air there so ill suited to his constitution that in each year of many that he had spent there he had been three or four times attacked by dangerous apoplexy, it is certain that, after such an experience, the fear of these fits would be a greater inducement to him to leave Rome than all his hopes of expected advantage would be to stay there, and that, therefore, he would bid it an eternal farewell, amd resolve to go as soon as possible to some climate which suited him better. If, then, he finds that, while remaining in the world, not a year passes that he does not frequently relapse into sin, an evil more terrible than any apoplexy, and nevertheless carelessly continues in a place so injurious to his spiritual health, I leave it to every one to decide whether he does not plainly show that he is less afraid of sin than of an apoplectic seizure, and consequently that he does not hate it as its supreme malice deserves, that is to say, more than any other object however hateful and terrible.

FOURTH CONSIDERATION.

On the most efficacious and proper manner of resisting temptations.

SUMMARY.

I. The nature and variety of temptations.

II. That every one soever will inevitably meet with them; that they are very dangerous to those who remain in them without thought, and equally useful to those who oppose them manfully.

III. What are the things which dispose us to temptations, and those which may help us to escape them.

IV. What the means necessary or useful for overcoming them.

I. You should observe the nature and variety of temptations. They are simply certain interior incitements, by which the soul is moved to sin; and they are divided into several classes according to the variety of the causes from which they spring, or of the objects to which they tend, or of the faculty in which they are produced, or of the manner in which they assail the soul. Then, as to their productive principle, they are divided, first of all, into human and diabolical temptations. We can see that some proceed from the presence of a sensible object, from physical constitution, from a vicious habit of the soul, and other similar natural causes; such as, for example, the desire a man feels to revenge himself at the moment of receiving some injury, or the instinct of gratifying his greediness when seated at a delicately served table. These temptations, having sufficient foundation and principle, partly in ourselves and partly in what we see and feel, are as a rule merely human temptations. Those are called

diabolical of which it seems that the devil is the sole or the principal author, on account of their occurring quite unexpectedly, without any occasion, and at times quite unconnected with them, as during prayer or Mass. This is further seen by their not increasing gradually, but starting up with great strength and violence at the very beginning, suddenly filling the imagination with strange appearances never heard or seen by the person in question, but so vividly represented that he thinks he really sees those objects and hears those words. At the same time there is a great disturbance of the physical constitution, and a violent inclination of the sensitive appetite to sin. Such, we may believe, were the temptations of which St. Paul complained, and which forced St. Benedict by their importunate fury to throw himself naked into a bush of sharp thorns. And so it is that no one can deem himself wholly secure from them, even though he should be a great saint, and live apart from all injurious occasions, and take care always to mortify his irregular passions; for these can never be so far extinguished in any one that if the devil (as God sometimes permits) vividly pictures to them the unlawful food of which they are by nature greedy, the suppressed desire will not be revived, and turn with all the force of natural inclination towards that food. Secondly, temptations differ according to different objects and faculties. Some are intellectual temptations, suggesting doubts in matters of faith, some are temptations of the irascible appetite, such as the affections of hatred and revenge, and others of the concupiscent appetite, such as the impulse towards some forbidden pleasure. Thirdly, and lastly, by observing the different manner in which those of the concupiscent and those of the irascible part assail us, we may subdivide both into speculative and practical temptations. Very often the whole of

the temptation consists in purely imaginary representations either of sins formerly committed by ourselves, or which we might have committed, or which others do commit. And here there is no danger of consummating by a final act the sins thus brought before the imagination, because they are either unreal or the sins of others, or if they are our own, they were committed in times past, and such as cannot really be committed now; but the danger is that of sinning merely by some interior act of complacency, or velleity with regard to those imaginary objects. At other times the temptation brings the sin before us, not merely as a thing of the past, or belonging to another, but as a thing that we can do as soon as we please, impelling us to desire to do it now; for example, to take vengeance on our neighbour, or to act in opposition to the sixth commandment at this present time. And of these temptations the latter are, for the most part, human, and commonly assail persons in the world, who are more easily able to carry them out in practice; the former are diabolical, and belong more to religious, who are not so free to sin grievously by external acts.

II. In order to gain a more complete knowledge of temptations, and so to dispose yourself the better to conquer them, consider three of their characteristics; that they are, humanly speaking, unavoidable by any one, very dangerous to those who are careless in resisting them, and just as useful to those who oppose them manfully. First, they are unavoidable, unless by a special grace of God, by any one, even by a religious, a solitary, a saint, and a perfect one, as is plainly shown by the examples of St. Paul, St. Jerome, and many heroes like them. For, after all, the time of our earthly life is, as Job tells us, a time of conflict, "The life of man upon earth is a warfare,"[1] and the devil, our

[1] Job. vii. 1.

implacable enemy, "as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour."[2] Wherefore the Preacher warns the servants of God to expect and be prepared to receive them: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation."[3] If only this truth is well understood and believed, it will prevent every one both from making sure of himself, as though his holiness made him incapable of ever being tempted, and from being disturbed because he is assailed by frequent and violent temptations, as though a thing extraordinary and unknown to the servants of God were happening to him. Secondly, they are very dangerous to persons who are careless and negligent in resisting them. For in this case we have not to do with mortal enemies of the same nature as ourselves, but with the devil, an enemy who, wherever we go and wherever we live, is always at our side, weapon in hand, watching his opportunity to deal a harder blow, never wearied by the length of the fight or the number of times we may have beaten him, but always ready to renew the attack with fresh vigour, who clearly sees, by the keenness of his angelic intellect, what is our weak point and where he may most easily overcome us, who, having been engaged from the beginning of the world in making war all day long upon mankind, and having often overthrown even the greatest heroes, is acquainted with every possible art of conquest, and yet, as though he were not strong enough by his own nature, fights against us with our own forces, that is to say, with our strongest natural inclinations, which are all in league with him to do battle against us. So that we may well consider ourselves very fortunate if, even when making every necessary effort, we are not conquered by so powerful an adversary, and there is no hope of our

[2] 1 St. Peter v. 8. [3] Ecclus. ii. 1.

gaining the victory if we are indolent and indifferent. "Our wrestling," exclaimes the Apostle, to arouse us to the necessary vigilance, "is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers."[4] Thirdly, temptations are an occasion of much profit to those who resist them manfully. For as this resistance consists in repelling the attacks of so formidable an enemy, and at the same time those of our interior passions which are in league with him, it cannot be made without a very great effort of virtue, and consequently without acts of extraordinary strength, each one of which, therefore, gains for us greater merit with God than numerous others less severe and difficult. And surely this ought to be a great encouragement to us, so that relying on the Divine assistance, we may receive cheerfully and courageously, nay, even regard as very great good fortune, these conflicts which, hard and painful as they are, are yet productive of great gain.

III. It will help you to consider that although no one can entirely escape temptations, we may nevertheless greatly diminish their force and frequency, both by banishing those things which occasion and excite them and by providing ourselves with those which have power to hinder them. And both these may be reduced to three. As to the former, by which tempations are commonly excited, there can be no doubt that the chief of them are pride, idleness, and familiarity with dangerous occasions. Pride, because by its nature it disposes us to sins of infidelity, anger, envy, and revenge, and because nothing is of greater force in repressing this vice in us, and making us sensibly conscious how weak our own strength is, than to be powerfully tempted, and led to the very verge of consent, especially if the temptation is of a base, disgraceful, and impure character. For which reason,

[4] Ephes vi. 12.

as Cassian observes, it is God's ordinary way, if He sees that any one has a great opinion of himself, to allow him for his confusion and cure, to be violently assailed, troubled, and overwhelmed by shameful suggestions and disgraceful impulses, so that he is not like the same person, but like an irrational animal, and can hardly decide whether he is saved or lost. Then there is idleness, for when the mind is not occupied with useful things, it is easily filled with useless and hurtful phantoms; "Idleness hath taught much evil."[5] Lastly there is familiarity with dangerous occasions, that is to say, conversing freely with all sorts of persons, looking at all sorts of things, and going to all sorts of places. It is easy to see that such conduct is to spur on the devil, and to put into his hands weapons to wound us. Then, as to the best means to employ against temptations, in order to lessen their frequency, the following are of great avail for this end: Cheerfulness and peace of mind, mortification of the passions even in lawful things, and a loving thought of God, renewed as often as possible during the day, For the soul is tempted to offend God only at times when it neglects to have a vivid and real thought of His presence, and it is not easy for a man to feel within himself a strong inclination to sin, who, from the desire of greater perfection, thwarts his natural appetites, even when he might indulge them without sin; neither can temptations have much power to harm where reason is present and active, as it is in cheerful and peaceful souls. Therefore, as you should endeavour to leave no place in yourself open to the suggestions of the enemy, and thus to secure yourself as much as possible from sin, you must be careful to exclude from your mind all vain confidence in yourself, not to spend any part of the day idly and without some

[5] Ecclus. xxiii. 29.

lawful occupation, to keep at a distance from your senses everything allied to sin, not to admit trouble and sadness into your soul, to mortify your inclinations even in things not sinful, and to keep as carefully as possible in your mind the thought of God and of His presence.

IV. Since, as has been said, temptations, although they may be lessened, cannot be entirely avoided, it remains to have in readiness those means which will be most helpful to you in overcoming them when they assail you. I here set down for you ten, so that you may choose those which are most necessary and suitable for you. The first is, not to give the evil thought time to take root in your imagination, from which with all your efforts you will hardly be able to dislodge it, but, directly you are aware of it, to turn your thoughts away from it to some other object, a thing which is very easily done at the first beginning. By this means the temptation will be over at once, and without any need of prolonged conflict. In a word, do not despise the enemy because he does not make much commotion at first, but act with the same promptitude and care which you would show if a spark flew upon your dress, or if you saw a viper at your feet. "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent."[6] Secondly, if the temptation continues, particularly if it is speculative, avoid idleness, indolence, and solitude, and either hasten to set yourself diligently to some useful work, or seek the society and conversation of friends, or distract your imagination from that hateful thing by singing, or other relaxations of that sort. Thirdly, have recourse with humility and confidence to the ever Blessed Virgin, your Angel Guardian, or any of your patron saints. This is a most important remedy, and one which is recommended to us as such by our Lord when He says —"Watch ye, and pray, that ye enter not into tempta-

[6] Ecclus. xxi. 2.

tion."[7] Fourthly, make some act contrary to the suggestions of the devil, as, for instance, lamenting your past sins, and hating and holding accursed the time when you committed them. But, above all, make great and sublime acts of the theological virtue of charity, declaring that, for the love of God, you will not only avoid, more than death itself, grievously offending Him in any way, but that you will also serve Him as perfectly as possible; and that, even if that unlawful pleasure to which the temptation is urging you were but a venial sin, and one that could be cancelled by taking holy water, and that you would be in no way obliged to confess, or in no danger of being lost for, nevertheless, for the sake of not displeasing Him, Whom you love more than yourself and every good thing you possess, nothing should induce you to take it. "Shall not my soul be subject to God?" Fifthly, reflect that if you yield to the temptation, you will indeed enjoy some pleasure, but that it will be very short, and followed by bitter repentance and indelible confusion, as you know by experience from what has happened to you whenever you sinned in time past; while, on the contrary, if you overcome the evil inclination to the sin which is represented to you, there will abide with you a peace and joy, oh, how far sweeter than that sensual gratification! "To him that overcometh I will give the hidden manna."[8] Then say to yourself, "Why, then, do I desire to do a thing for which I am quite certain that I shall be sorry directly after?" Sixthly, remember that many persons die suddenly and unexpectedly, either in the very act of sinning or immediately afterwards, without having time to reinstate themselves in God's grace before death, as they hoped to do when they consented to the temptation, in which case their consent was their damnation.

[7] St. Matt. xxvi. 41. [8] Apoc. ii. 17.

Consider that it is possible that the same thing may happen to you. You may in a few minutes be struck by apoplexy or some other mortal attack, unsuspected by you but foreseen by the devil, who is a very skilful doctor, and who tempts you so strongly, in order to drag you, not only into sin, but at the same time into hell. Seventhly, it will also be a useful way in speculative temptations, which are of some continuance, to set yourself to confound the devil by reviling him with these or similar reproaches—"Ah! impure, abominable, and infamous spirit, are you not ashamed, being of so noble a nature, to suggest to me abominations so odious, which are enough to make the boldest man blush? This, then, miserable wretch, is the great gain thou hast acquired by rebelling against thy Creator! This is what sin has brought thee to, to negotiate all kinds of wickedness, a business which even among men is considered most disgraceful! Unhappy spirit! when thou wast in honour thou didst not understand; thou hast been compared to senseless beasts, and art become like to them. Away with thee, and hide thy shame in hell, thou rejected of heaven, detested of earth, the offscouring of all rational creatures!" Eighthly, if the sinful object has taken a great hold on the imagination, and in consequence made a deep impression also on the sensitive appetite (as usually happens when the temptation is diabolical), so that, notwithstanding your repeated efforts to turn your mind away from it, it continues to allure you by its attractive appearance, it will help you to conceive a right sentiment of contempt for it, and so to get rid of it altogether, if you set yourself quietly to examine what it really is; that is, to consider it, not as your imagination pictures it, namely as a pure pleasure, and a pleasure which is untruly exaggerated till it wears the appearance of an earthly beatitude, but as a pleasure base in its nature,

very brief in its duration, and—which is more important—fatal to the soul, and inseparable from that supreme evil of offending God and making Him your enemy; and then mock at the temptation which urges you to linger over the taste of its poisonous sweetness, and wonder at yourself for ever having been able to allow an idea so contrary to all reason to enter your mind. "For it is certainly true," you may say, "that if I were to commit the sin which is presented to me, I should feel a pleasure which is very agreeable to the senses. But what of that? Let the pleasure be what it may, let it be ten times more intense than it is; is it great enough to make it worth my while to offend God on that account? Is it not absurd, ridiculous, utterly inadmissible? Shall I be induced to offend God, Whom I love more than myself and every imaginable good that I possess, for the sake of this pleasure? Is it more difficult to deny myself such a pleasure as this than to be burnt at a slow fire? Certainly not; there is no one who would not renounce it with the utmost readiness from fear of the fire. How then can I, for the sake of enjoying it, offend God, rather then offend Whom I would readily die by being slowly burnt? Away with such enormous, irrational absurdity." I repeat that, in temptations of the concupiscent part of the soul, particularly when they are strong and persistent, it will be useful to reason thus, and even to express your wonder and contempt at suggestions so absurd by a derisive look, by laughing them to scorn, and by gestures of mockery. For the greater the calmness and superiority with which the reason regards a sinful pleasure, the better will it discover its insignificance, and how far it is surpassed by supernatural motives. For in reality, and according to its physical intensity, the pleasure is not much greater than is experienced by the touch and taste in many natural

and innocent sensations. And that strange force by which, as though by witchcraft, it disturbs, entrances, distorts the will, and all but deprives it of its freedom, is entirely owing to its being regarded in a confused way by the imaginative, and without any examination by the intellectual, part of the soul. I think, therefore, that when tempted thus, it is a wonderfully effectual way of dispelling the temptation at once to resist it in this brave, quiet, and contemptuous manner. Ninthly, in temptations against faith, by no means begin arguing with the devil, and exposing his artful sophistries, but turn away from their solicitations, and make acts of the love of God—fervent, universal, and, above all, full of joy. For temptations of this sort, which are confused, fanciful, and painful, hardly ever molest the servants of God except when their minds are troubled by some disturbance and sadness, so that they can frequently be dispelled at once by merely cheering the spirits and dwelling on a more agreeable idea. Sometimes it will help to say suddenly, resolutely, and contemptuously—"Away with these subtleties! What is the use of losing time in examining matters which have been already discussed and settled so often? These difficulties which are troubling me are not new points, which have just been mooted and heard for the first time. Thousands of great doctors, far superior to me in genius and learning, saw and examined them ages ago, and found them to be of no weight, so that they made nothing of them, but continued, in defiance of them, to believe with still more undoubting constancy the mysteries proposed to them by the Church. They have amply studied all these subjects: I have nothing to do but to believe." Tenthly, and lastly, it is of the greatest importance in all kinds of temptations, let them be ever so violent and continuous, to despise them, and to keep yourself free from all perturbation,

sadness, and fear, cheerful and courageous in the midst of all their assaults. For no matter what efforts are made by the infernal tempter, no matter how often he returns to the charge, you are guilty of no sin unless you consent with advertence of will, and this, after commending yourself to God, you ought to consider as a thing which, by the help of His grace, is perfectly certain never to occur. It follows, therefore, that however troublesome the temptation may be, it cannot of itself do the slightest harm; on the contrary, it gives you an opportunity of gaining very great fruit, and the greater in proportion to its importunity, because of the merit which you will gain by making a manly resistance every time its assaults are repeated with increased violence. It is a good thing, too, to deride the devil openly, to challenge him to continue the battle, and to declare that, relying on the help of God, you fear him no more than you would a contemptible worm or fly. "Resist the devil, and he will fly from you."[9] Observe, not merely will he depart like one who has no hope of gaining anything, but he will fly, which is the conduct of one who fears to lose something.

[9] St. James iv. 7.

FIFTH CONSIDERATION.

On diligence in performing as many acts of virtue as possible.

SUMMARY.

I. How great the gain is which we make by every act of virtue.
II. How short and how uncertain is the time we have for making this gain.
III. Whence proceeds the meritorious value of our acts of virtue.
IV. The determination to make acts of virtue our settled and ordinary practice.

I. Consider the importance and reasonableness of desiring to perform as many acts of virtue as possible. For by every such act, as for instance, the visiting a church, or giving a small sum in alms, we gain nothing less than an eternity of blessedness, that is, as much essential glory, as much of the vision of God, as would alone and of itself, suffice to render us, for all eternity, possessors of an infinite good, and therefore perfectly happy. And this is again incomparably greater than if we were to secure at once all the riches of Solomon, all the science of Aristotle, all the military glory of Alexander, all the power of Augustus Cæsar; for no one of these possessions, nay, not all of them put together, are sufficient to put us in a state of absolute and complete beatitude, which a single and the least degree of the vision of God is able to do. What sort of gains, then, are these? Are they worth much? Do they deserve that we should endeavour to obtain them at any price? We may be sure that if any one of us were assured of receiving a thousand pounds for

every Mass he heard, he would not let a day pass without hearing one, nay, that he would not be satisfied with one a day, but would spend the whole morning in hearing as many as possible. And do we not know that, as a reward for every Mass we hear devoutly, God promises us treasures in comparison of which not only a thousand pounds but the riches of all the kings of the earth are mere poverty? If, then, we should be and are eager to perform any work, to endure any fatigue, to overcome any difficulty, for the sake of the poor and transitory rewards of this life; how much more active, courageons, and unwearied ought we, by every rule of right reason, to be for the sake of the immense and everlasting blessings of the life to come? And yet in this matter alone the least thing seems too much for us; we are exhausted as soon as we have taken one step; we pass hours and days doing nothing, idle, sleepy, and listless, as if the gains which we may make every minute by labouring, and which we lose every minute by ceasing to labour, were of no value whatever. Oh, where is our faith? Where is our right judgment of things? Where is our common sense and the love which we should properly have for ourselves?

II. Consider, that the time you have for thus enriching yourself by means of acts of virtue is very brief and uncertain, that is to say, it is only the time you have to live in this world: how long it may be you cannot possibly know, but you do know that it is short, and that it may end at any moment, and that, when once it has ended, you will be unable to gain any more merit throughout the whole coming eternity. Surely, this knowledge ought to make you eager and anxious to perform as many acts of virtue as possible now, and never to grow weary while there is time (a time which may be very short indeed), to increase your heavenly beatitude, by making a good use of it. The

better to understand this, imagine that if a great king on leaving his palace for a time, were to have his treasury thrown open, and give permission to all his servants to take out of it as much money, precious vessels and jewels as they chose and were able to carry, but gave notice at the same time that he would shortly return, and that then the treasury would be closed, and no one able to take the smallest coin from it. What, I ask you, would be the conduct of the servants in such circumstances? Would there be one among them who would idly neglect to profit by so short and valuable a space of time? What do you suppose? I can fancy that I see the eager anxiety with which they would lay aside for the time all other occupations and thoughts, and hasten to load themselves with as much treasure as possible; how they would carry it home in all haste, and as speedily return for fresh spoils, without either feeling the weight, or minding the labour and weariness. And if there were one who ungratefully disregarded so splendid an opportunity, and spent all the time in amusement or sleep, what do you suppose would be his feelings on seeing the treasury closed at his lord's return, and himself left poor and empty-handed among his companions enriched with precious booty? How angry he would be with himself! In what bitter terms he would curse his insane indolence! Well, then, that is precisely our case: just so has God thrown open the treasury of His heavenly glory to all men, giving them free leave to draw upon it as they please till His coming—"Trade, till I come;"[1] but at the same time warning them that, when the period is over, they will not through all eternity have a single moment to enrich themselves in this way. Learn hence the priceless value of the time which is now granted you, and the anxious eagerness you should show to employ it as

[1] St. Luke xix. 13.

profitably as possible, and, on the other hand, the bitter but unavailing repentance which you will feel at your death for having squandered and lost it.

III. After having, by means of the above considerations, excited in your heart a due desire of acquiring gains so precious, you should convince yourself of two truths very necessary to acquaint yourself with and attend to in this matter. First, that our merit in the eyes of God consists solely and entirely in the interior acts, that is to say, in the intention and affections, which are the moral life of our exterior work. If this essential quality is wanting, our actions have no merit whatever, and according as its excellence is greater or less, is the proportion of their merit. Secondly, that the excellence of our interior acts proceeds from three sources, namely from the greatness or difficulty of the work which is intended; from the nobility of the motive from which it is intended; and from the intensity of the love with which it is intended. So that, in proportion to the greatness of each of these conditions in any act is, *cæteris paribus*, the dignity and value they impart to it. Therefore it is more meritorious to endure an atrocious calumny than a contemptuous jest, to hate sin for the love of God than from the fear of hell, and to be conformed to the Divine Will with a full and intense resignation, than with one which is cool and moderate.

IV. Lastly, on coming to the practical conclusion of the truths which you have hitherto considered in the abstract, bring before your mind all those acts of virtue which regard the worship of God or His saints, the love of your neighbour, or the holy hatred and abnegation of self enjoined in the Gospel. Under the first head come visits to churches, Communions, mental and vocal prayer, pious affections, and devout aspirations through the day, as also acts of the theological

virtues, faith, hope, and charity; of gratitude for God's favours and of conformity to His will, of the worship and veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, your Angel Guardian, and all the saints to whom the Church pays public honour. To the second head belong the visiting and waiting on the sick, giving alms to the poor, pitying and consoling the sorrowful, gladly and readily rendering the services asked of you, bearing with the imperfections and ill conduct of others, helping the souls in Purgatory by your prayers, and labouring in every possible way for the conversion of sinners. Under the third head place the restraining of the tongue from idle talking, refusing unnecessary indulgences to the senses, moderation in sleep, a hard bed, scanty food, the afflicting of the body with voluntary inconvenience and severe penances, crossing our own will, overcoming curiosity about useless things, and all else that belongs both to interior and exterior mortifications. Having thus classed the various meritorious acts of virtue, go on to choose amongst them for yourself that number and degree which you think your strength will enable you to practise from this time forth: being firmly convinced that it is all for your own interest, and that if you resolve on doing much you will only be conferring a benefit on yourself, and this benefit is that you will have a happier death, and enjoy greater fruit for all eternity; and surely this is worth gaining at the cost of a very light and transitory labour in this life. So that, although it may be better to set yourself at first a prudent proportion, which you will be able to accomplish thoroughly, yet as time goes on, you ought not to be satisfied with this, but to go on increasing it with an insatiable desire of more and greater gains, animating yourself with these words of the Apostle—"He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who soweth in blessings shall also

reap of blessings;"[2] "In doing good let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing; therefore whilst we have time let us work good."[3] Letting slip no opportunity of doing a good act which presents itself, *hic et nunc*, but taking advantage of it, like a careful merchant, who never thinks he has gained riches enough, but without regard to the gains he has hitherto made, is from morning to night watching and seeking for fresh opportunities of making money—"neither is there any end of his gains." I will only add one thing more; that whether your acts of virtue are few or many, you have to consider two things in performing them. First, if you would not lose all the merit of them, not to do them from mere custom or for entirely human ends, but deliberately, and out of regard to supernatural motives, more especially to that which is the chief of these, the desire of pleasing God. Secondly, in order to increase the merit of your good works, do not be satisfied with always accompanying the exterior act with supernatural movements of the will, but also strive to make them as intense, as fervent, and perfect as possible.

[2] 2 Cor. ix. 6. [3] Galat. vi. 9.

SIXTH CONSIDERATION.

On the love of God.

SUMMARY.

I. How right it is to have a great love of God.
II. How precious are the fruits proceeding from it.
III. What are the marks and effects proper to it.
IV. Examination of ourselves as to a virtue so important.

I. Consider how just and right it is to love God "with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength." And this, both because He is the most beautiful, perfect, and lovable Object that can be anywhere presented to you; nay, rather, He is the Ideal Beauty, Perfection, and Loveliness Itself, so that all other things are beautiful, perfect, and lovable, merely from their participation of It, and from Its sweetness alone it is that all things besides are sweet. Neither can they be loved unless He is what is chiefly loved in them; and also because He is the Chief Good among all that you have, or can ever have, that is to say, He is your entire Beatitude, so that you cannot love yourself and your own good without at the same, time loving Him. And as among the good things that you possess you always love the greater more than the less, you ought te love Him more than all of them, and also because, before you had any merit, and without any interest of His, He loved you more than your father, or mother, or any earthly friend ever loved you, as is proved by the innumerable and singular benefits which you have received of His lavish bounty, in the orders both of nature and of grace. Therefore, not

to love Him in return with your whole heart, would be to show yourself entirely without one, to rebel against your own nature, and to appear as a monster or a wild beast among men—nay, worse than any beast, for you would lack that sense of affectionate gratitude which nature has implanted even in the fiercest animals.

II. Consider the precious fruits which you will gather from the love of God. For there can be found no virtue among them all more excellent, meritorious, and pleasing to God than this heavenly love, nor one the practice of which more rejoices the soul, makes it easier to avoid sin, to despise temporal goods, to bear the troubles which are met with in the spiritual life, and to attain to full evangelical perfection. Hence the magnificent eulogium which the holy doctors vie with each other in making of it, some, as St. Thomas Aquinas, calling it the mother of all virtues, "because by the conception of its end it produces the acts of virtues;" others, as St. Laurence Justinian, calling i heavenly, because if our earthly gold helps us to obtain all earthly goods, and so virtually contains them all in itself, the pure love of God "is sufficient for the gaining of virtues, nay, it comprises all virtues in itself." Some call it a pearl of such value that the wise merchant in the Gospel gave all his wealth for it; as St. Augustine, who says: "This pearl of great price is charity, without which nothing else that you may have will profit you, and which, if you have it, is enough for you of itself alone." Lastly, there are some who call it the fulfilling of the whole law, as St. Paul, the Doctor of the Gentiles, who says, "Love s th fulfilling of the Law."[1]

III. In order to see how you ought to love God, and by what signs you may discover whether you love Him truly, go over in your mind the effects which every

[1] Romans xiii. 10.

love, of its proper nature, produces in him who is inflamed thereby, and in particular the seven which I here subjoin, and which are so closely bound up with it, that it is an impossibility for it to exist where they are entirely absent, or for it to be absent where they exist; and according as they are found in an intense or a scanty measure, is the strength of the love itself. Let us conaider them one by one. First, when a man loves anything, he delights in often calling it to mind; he dwells upon it, and speaks of it to others, as we see in the case of a mother and her child, a miser and his hoards, a man of letters and his studies. Therefore it is impossible that one who loves God should not take delight in often remembering, thinking, and speaking of Him, as was the custom of all the saints who truly loved Him. And if, on the other hand, any one finds it tedious and unpleasant to think and speak of Him, it is clear that such a man does not really love Him. The second effect of all love is to take pleasure in being with the beloved object, and to desire its presence when absent from it. He, therefore, who loves God, desires to see and to be with Him, that is, to end the banishment of this life as soon as possible, for here we are "absent from the Lord," and can only see Him in shadows and figures, very different from His true likeness. These, surely, were the longings of the saints; and the man who instead of sharing them, would fain live as long as possible in this world, far from the vision of God, and would be troubled at the arrival of the hour when he was to go to Him, cannot certainly be said to love Him. Thirdly, he who loves another is impelled by his love to desire, and as far as possible to cause him to be known, esteemed, reverenced, and praised by all men. And the same should be the case with every one who loves God, that is, he should feel an ardent zeal for His glory, and labour to

the utmost to make Him known, reverenced, served, and loved by all His creatures. A fourth characteristic of love is that offences and injuries committed against one we love are felt precisely as if they were done to us. How, then, can it be believed that that man loves God fervently who, while keenly resenting every slight offence against himself, beholds with unmoved countenance and mind, as though they in no way concerned him, the grievous insults which are everywhere daily offered to God by sinners, their irreverent behaviour before His altars, their disrespectful mention of His Name, the freedom with which they transgress His laws? He cannot even persuade himself so; but he must either feel the grief which the saints felt at seeing such things, and which every son feels at seeing his father insulted, or acknowledge that he does not consider God as a Friend and Father, but as a stranger and an alien. Fifthly, it is a consequence of love to avoid most carefully everything which can be, even in the slightest degree, an occasion or matter of displeasure to the person loved. And so a little care and diligence should result from the love of God, to do nothing which displeases Him, however little. Sixthly, true love is shown by deeds, that is, by being ready to labour for our friend without giving a thought to our own trouble if only we may please and serve him, We may, therefore, conclude that we love God with true and inward charity, or merely in a superficial way, according as we have or have not this readiness to labour and suffer in His service. Seventhly, to love a person is the same thing as to be identified with him, desiring everything which he desires, and taking pleasure in everything which pleases him. If, then, there is in us a perfect love of God, it will follow as a necessary consequence from it, that there is a like conformity of our will with His in

all things which happen by His good pleasure and Providence.

IV. It remains for you to examine whether and how far these seven effects of love are in you with regard to that object which is of all the most worthy of love, that is God. For in the same degree that you find them in your soul you may be certain that the love of God is there also. Go through them, therefore, one by one, and humble yourself when you discover any one of them to be either wanting, or very scanty in you, and strive by means of the two powerful motives considered at the beginning, to excite yourself from this time forth, to love more entirely, that is, in all these seven ways, and with the utmost possible perfection in each one, a Lord Who can never be loved worthily and according to what He merits so long as He is loved less than infinitely,

SEVENTH CONSIDERATION.

On the love of our neighbour.

SUMMARY.

I. Of the usefulness, importance, and necessity of having a great love of our neighbour.

II. In what consists the perfection of this love.

III. Examination as to what our practice has been hitherto, and what it ought to be in future in this matter.

I. Consider the motives which may incite you to the love of your neighbour, and in particular these three. First, the words in which our Lord has urged it upon us, words which we shall hardly find Him ever to have used concerning any other virtue. He called it *His* commandment, as though in a certain sense He enjoined and required of us no other: "This is My commandment that you love one another."[1] He has also given it to us as a mark and badge by which it may be known whether we are His disciples: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another."[2] Further still, He has declared that He is more pleased with works undertaken for the relief of others, than with sacrifices in His honour: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."[3] Lastly He says that He regards as done to His own Person whatsoever we do to any of our brethren: "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me."[4] Hence it appears how much He has this

[1] St. John xv. 12. [2] St. John xiii. 35. [3] St. Matt. ix. 13. [4] St. Matt. xxv. 40.

virtue at heart, and how much it is in our power to please Him by practising it, or to displease Him by acting contrary to it. As a second motive we may take the very liberal and wonderful promises which our Lord has made to every one who loves and relieves his neighbour, calling him blessed, and assuring him that for this reason he shall receive help from Him: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."[5] "Give and it shall be given to you . . . . for with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."[6] From all which we must conclude how very important the exercise of this virtue is. For on the one hand it is very certain that we are always living amidst a thousand wants and dangers, both of body and soul, and that in order to supply the former and escape the latter the constant assistance of the Divine help is an absolute necessity for us, and we know on the other hand that our Lord has declared that He will give us that help according to the measure, whether scanty or abundant, in which we have afforded it to our neighbour. So that of this, if of any virtue, it may be said that we ought to strain ourselves to the utmost to perform it, for the good tha we do to others helps ourselves more than them: they receive from us such help only as man can give, weak, scanty, and confined to this or that class of wants, whilst we, by helping them, merit a help incomparably superior, being that of God; a help of which it is enough to say that by means of it we shall infallibly attain everlasting salvation, as we may surely gather from the two different sentences which the elect and the reprobate will receive at the final Judgment, the former that of eternal life—"Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,"[7] the latter of eternal

[5] St. Matt. v. 7. [6] St. Luke vi. 38. [7] St. Matt. xxv. 34.

misery—"Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire."[8] For no other reason is given in the Gospel for this difference than that, in the case of the former, of the mercy they have exercised—"I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; naked, and you covered Me; sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me;" and of the latter, of their having failed in its exercise—"I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me not to drink," with the rest that follows. Not, indeed, but that there are very many other sins worthy of everlasting condemnation besides those against charity, but because God either does not permit any merciful and charitable person to fall into such sins, or does not let him die till he has obtained forgiveness for them. Whence it follows that as none of them die in sin, none of them will be condemned with the reprobate; and that as charity is the principal reason for their having been preserved from sin, it is also assigned as the one cause of their everlasting salvation. As though the Sovereign Judge, in pronouncing the sentence of the elect had said—"Come to My kingdom, O ye blessed, because, by showing charity to your neighbour, you have merited that I should preserve you from those sins which bar its entrance;" and in condemning the reprobate had intended to say the exact reverse, "Depart, miserable souls, into everlasting fire, because, by not relieving My poor, you have merited that I should allow you to fall into and die in those sins to which it is due." And this is not an arbitrary interpretation of mine, but a consequence which may very plainly be inferred from those other words of our Lord, in which He calls the merciful "blessed" on account of the mercy which was to be

[8] St. Matt. xxv. 41.

shown them in return by Him. For it is not possible that, if the mercy here promised them, were merely that which bestows temporal prosperity, they should be called absolutely blessed on account of such a return by a God Who denounces nothing but ill, "Woe unto you rich," &c., on those who possess that prosperity. We may add, as a third motive, that there is none of the exercises of the spiritual life more common or possible to all persons soever, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, healthy or sick, than this one. For there may be many who have not sufficient strength either to afflict their bodies with extraordinary austerities or to keep their minds long fixed in contemplation. But you cannot point out the man who lacks the power and ability to love his neighbour with the greatest perfection. And if he does this, he may, by this means alone, enrich himself with very great merits, and attain to a very high degree of sanctity: for, after the love of God, there is not a more excellent virtue than true love for our neighbour; indeed, as St. Thomas teaches, they are one and the same virtue, as the Apostle says in the Epistle to the Romans, "He that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law."[9]

II. If you observe in what the practice of this most important virtue consists, you will find that the whole of its perfection is reduced to that rule of our Lord's that we are to love all men in the way we love ourselves: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."[10] And this rule may be divided into two others; one of which is negative, namely, not to do to any one what we would not have him do to us, as the good old Tobias charges his son, saying, "See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another;"[11] the other positive, to do for others everything which we should wish them to do for us, and this is enjoined

[9] Romans xiii. 8. [10] St. Matt. xxii. 39. [11] Tobias iv. 16.

us by the Incarnate Word in these words from St. Matthew's Gospel, "All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them."[12] It is evident that neither can we, without observing these two particular rules, fully keep that universal and primary law of loving our neighbour as ourselves, nor, if we fulfil them both, can we fail to keep that law perfectly. These rules are observed partly by the understanding and partly by the will; partly by the tongue and partly by the operative faculties of the body; that is, by guarding ourselves, on the one hand, from forming any intellectual act, or giving any voluntary consent, from saying a word or doing an action in regard to others which we should not like to be formed, said, or done in regard to us, wherein consists the negative perfection of charity; and, on the other hand, in order to attain also to its positive perfection, to endeavour to make all our thoughts, desires, words, and actions concerning others such as we should like theirs to be towards ourselves. And in order to have both a clearer and more detailed view of this practice, it will be well to set before us the manner in which we should like those with whom we live to behave to us. To begin, then, with the understanding, should we like others to depreciate and censure us, to look at our conduct in the worst light, to judge us unkindly, and to have a bad opinion of us? Certainly not; rather we wish them to think well of us, to think of our conduct kindly, and to judge us favourably. We ought, then, to observe the same rule towards others if we love them as ourselves. Secondly, arguing in like manner as to acts of the will, should we like others to regard us with mental aversion, to get angry at every fault we commit, to be sorry for any good, and pleased at any evil that befalls us? Surely not; rather we

[12] St. Matt. vii. 12.

wish them to love us with fraternal affection, to be compassionate to our failings, to desire and regard with pleasure, as if it were their own, all that happens in our favour. Thus, then, true charity requires us to feel towards all others. Thirdly, to carry on the same consideration as to speaking, should we like another to speak to us in a domineering and slighting manner, to condemn us, to mock and jeer at us, to blame our conduct to others, and to amuse himself at our expense by making it a subject of ridicule and contempt? Of course not; on the contrary, we should like all with whom we have intercourse to treat us gently, politely, and courteously, and always to speak of us with approval, respect, and commendation. This, then, should be our way of behaving to every one, if we would fulfil the commandment of Christ, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Fourthly, and lastly, to go on to actions, should we like others to do things to inconvenience and annoy us, not to behave to us with ordinary civility, to perform the services we ask of them with negligence, to injure us in our property, or to desert us in our necessities where they were able to help us? Again, certainly not; but rather we should wish them to avoid everything by which we might suffer wrong or annoyance, to serve us readily, to assist us with charity, in a word, to treat us as a friend and brother. This, then, is the rule which charity prescribes to us with regard to our conduct to our neighbour; and, as an instance, when any one asks help or alms of us, let us suppose that we are in the same need and appealing for help to the kindness of others, and not venture to give a refusal to that other, as though we should not mind receiving one ourselves in similar circumstances.

III. After having excited yourself by the motives set forth in the beginning, to an ardent desire of

Christian charity, and also seen the way of practising it perfectly, go on to examine yourself in the order which has been given, as to your conduct in this respect, and if you find that you have not practised it fully in all its parts, resolve to supply henceforward whatever is most wanting to its perfect exercise. At the same time you must take notice that these two conditions are necessary: your charity must be supernatural as to its motive, and universal as to its object. The former requires that its acts should be free from every human end of affection, esteem, or gratitude which may result to ourselves, and should proceed purely from God, and the desire of pleasing Him, the latter requires that they should extend so far as to embrace all men with whom we live in the world, of whatever condition, whether they be strangers or friends, gentle or simple, cultivated or rude, polite or impolite, virtuous or bad; so that there is no one, however mean or unsightly, however coarse, ungrateful, obstinate, vicious, and repulsive to us, whom we do not cherish in our hearts, to whom we do not show all the offices of the truest charity, and whom we do not love as ourselves. For, according to what has been said, the motive of love ought not to spring from the personal qualities of this or that man, but from the will of God Who commands us to love all without exception, and from the Person of Christ, Whom they represent to us as so many copies of Him.

EIGHTH CONSIDERATION.

On perseverance in the good sentiments and resolutions formed during the time of the Exercises.

SUMMARY.

I. That nothing at all has been done in the Exercises, if the good sentiments, affections, and resolutions which we then formed are not firmly kept.

II. That the two means which helped us in forming them, namely, retirement from intercourse with the world, and the consideration of the Eternal Truths, will be a special help to us in keeping them.

III. The use that we ought to make for the future of these two means.

I. Convince yourself that the main and essential utility of the Exercises does not consist in spending a certain number of days piously with God, as you have been doing, but in real, solid, and firm amendment of life, to be begun and kept up at home for your whole future life, as you resolved during the time of the Exercises. So that a person is not, after one or two weeks, to return to the vices and sins of the past; but to continue to maintain, living and unchanged, the good sentiments, affections, and resolutions, which, by God's goodness, he has formed. It follows that now you are returning home, so far from finishing the work of the Exercises, you are rather beginning it, in regard of their substantial part. For in the days which have just gone by, you have done no more than urge, resolve, and prepare yourself to lead a new and better way of life; and this, after the meditations which have been a preparation, and as it were, a prelude for that purpose,

remains to be practically carried out, so that you will be going on all the year making the Spiritual Exercises, which, unless they are completed in this manner, you would not, properly speaking, have made, but merely studied. This point was very well remarked upon by a lady of much intelligence in Paris, who, as she was returning home after hearing a sermon, was asked by a gentleman, who was hurrying to Church, whether the sermon was done or not. She answered: "No." "Why, then," he asked, "do I see so many persons leaving the Church?" "Because," she returned, "the preacher has just finished speaking." "What a strange contradiction!" said the gentleman; "if the preacher has finished speaking, the sermon must be done." "Wait a little," replied the lady. "When a sermon has been preached it is not done: there is the part which concerns the preacher only, and the part which concerns both the preacher and the people; the former has just finished, and the latter is beginning, and will only be completed when the preacher's exhortations have been followed by his hearers. You ought not, therefore, to be surprised and to think it a contradiction when I said that the sermon had been preached, and yet was not done." You may very well apply this lady's words about sermons to your Exercises.

II. Having settled this, go on to consider what are the best means to employ for making the good will with which you are now animated firm and lasting, in spite of every hindrance and distraction. And you will find none better adapted for this than those which inspired it. For it is a principle most certain by universal induction that the same causes which were capable of producing a certain result, either moral or physical, in a subject, are equally capable of maintaining it. As to physical results, we may take as an instance the heat which is maintained near the fire,

and which was also produced by it; and as a moral instance, the luxury which is stimulated by the same abundance of wealth which was its origin. What, then, are the means which Divine grace made use of to place in your soul that contempt of temporal interests, that appreciation of eternal salvation, that resolution of living according to the maxims of the faith which are now in it? You will remark that there were two principal means, namely, retirement from worldly intercourse, and the consideration of the Eternal Truths, and experience has shown you how greatly they avail for making a man enter into himself, and so be better disposed to listen to the words of God. You have then to conclude that if after returning home you continue the use of these two powerful instruments, the good sentiments and affections which were produced in your soul by their means, will also, by their help, be maintained there.

III. This, then, must be your chief care, namely, to provide as efficaciously as possible for their continual use, resolving as to the first to keep apart in future, not only from company which is vicious, and which induces to sin, but also from that which is vain and detrimental to the spiritual profit of the soul, that is to say, from intercourse with persons who, though they may not be dissolute and bad, have their hearts entirely absorbed in the esteem and love of earthly things, and who can talk of nothing but honours, dignities, riches, and worldly advancement. For this idle talk of theirs would be like cold water poured upon the fervour of your devotion; and it would not be long, if you often listened to it, before you gradually found your ideas and desires completely changed; that is to say, you would lose that contempt for worldly things, that zeal for your spiritual good, that relish for prayer, and, in short, be as void of all those good dispositions of which

you are at present conscious, as if you had never made the Spiritual Exercises. Therefore, if you would not see all the fruit of them vanish in a few days, you must, as I say, as far as possible avoid the society and intercourse of such persons; and if in consequence (seeing that there are very few in the world who are not of the number) you should have to lessen the time and occasions you spend in intercourse with men, you must be willing to accept a life of greater retirement and solitude. For the spiritual life is not so trifling a possession that for its sake you ought not to deprive yourself of some human gratification, but rather so great a one that in order to attend it better and more uninterruptedly, you ought to think it a wise resolution to fly, as so many of God's servants have done, from all human society whatever into perpetual and utter solitude. As to the second means, that of frequently calling to mind the Eternal Truths (besides hearing Mass, saying vocal prayers, and practising other devotions of a like sort which you have fixed upon as a daily exercise of piety, and which, when they are not performed as a mere formality, are profitable for renewing the memory, and keeping alive the thought of God and of supernatural truths), you should make a strict practice, not to be omitted, of devoting to them two periods in the day. The first should be immediately after rising from bed, and before entering upon any of your worldly occupations, when you should for at least half an hour dwell quietly within yourself on the principal points on which you meditated in the course of the Exercises, and by the consideration of which you were then most moved, such as that God is your Creator and Lord, on Whom depends all your temporal and eternal welfare, and to Whom you are bound by every reason to render faithful service; that this life was not given you by

Him to be spent in the care of earthly things, but that by fully keeping His law you might obtain the everlasting beatitude of heaven; that this is the only matter for which you should be concerned, and of which you should think from morning to night, and in comparison of which you should despise all merely worldly affairs and interests as child's play, and a useless waste of time; that in a few years—it may be days—you will have to quit this earthly life for another, which is unending, and how you would wish to have lived when the time comes for that last journey; that as soon as your soul has left this world of sense, you will have to render an exact account to God, the Supreme Judge, of all that you have done, read, and thought through all the years of your life, and particularly this day, in order to receive then at once from Him the last and irrevocable sentence, either of everlasting bliss in heaven or of eternal torment in hell, according to what you have now merited. After having called to mind and spent some time in the consideration of these all-important truths, renew the resolutions which you made at the time of the Exercises, to order all your present life so as to attain a happy eternity, and to attend to your other affairs here in such a manner as not to neglect for them the most important of all, the salvation of your soul. And above all, you should renew with all possible energy your resolutions of keeping faithful to your Heavenly Master, and of never consenting to offend Him for anything in the world, looking on, for this purpose, to the occasions which may present themselves of doing so during the day, and arming yourself against each of them, both by fervent acts of perfect love of Him, and by humbly imploring the help of His Divine grace. The second time should be another half-hour either soon after dinner or later in the evening, which you

should spend in carefully and thoughtfully reading some pious book, and so in rekindling by this means the fervour of the good sentiments and affections which were excited in your soul by the preceding Exercise of the morning. You will be wise if you are punctual and exact in regularly giving these two spaces of time every day to a means of so much importance for keeping up your devotion; but far wiser still if, not satisfied with the scanty measure here prescribed, you endeavour to increase it as much as the necessary occupations of your state and calling allow.

NINTH CONSIDERATION.

On Prayer.

SUMMARY.

I. How many methods of prayer there are.
II. How necessary and important each of them is.
III. How, and how much, we should practise them.

I. You must observe that prayer, in order to be perfect and thoroughly fruitful, should be made not merely vocally, reciting with the lips some forms of praising or invoking God, such as our Lady's Rosary or the Divine Office, but still more mentally, dwelling in deep meditation on some supernatural truth, and that it should be practised every day, both at times of considerable length, such as an hour or half an hour uninterruptedly, and which are exclusively devoted to it, and also continually through the day, and even in the midst of exterior occupations, by means of short but affective aspirations to God, which are repeated from time to time either with the tongue, or silently, and which are called ejaculatory prayers.

II. Go on to consider the vast importance of this holy Exercise as to each of the three methods of practising it, about to be described. For, in the first place, we have the greatest need of having recourse to God, and imploring His aid; and this for the easier exciting of devotion is usually done by vocal prayers, which may either be short and often repeated, or continued for a certain and considerable space of time. For without His favour we can neither do nor have any good thing,

and this favour is not granted by Him to those who neglect to ask for it. "Ask, and it shall be given you."[1] Secondly, it is highly necessary also to give some time every day to meditation on supernatural truths; for we cannot, unless we often dwell upon them, keep up a vivid idea of them in our minds, and without this idea we cannot despise the goods of this life, resist the evil inclinations of nature, overcome the difficulties of the spiritual life, and go on making progress in the service of God. Thirdly, and lastly, we see, on the one hand, that long, regular, and continuous prayer, whether vocal or mental, can only be made by the majority of persons for a few hours of the day; and yet that, on the other hand, we are in continual hourly need both of seeking the Divine help, and of energetically resisting the instincts of our corrupt nature. From which is clearly seen the necessity we are under of repeatedly lifting up our hearts and minds to God in every time and place, by which means we both supplicate His heavenly grace in all the occurrences which are hourly happening, and continue to keep alive in our will the fervour of devotion which otherwise would easily, and to our great detriment, die out. In short, both faith and natural reason teach us with absolute certainty that God is the sole Source of all perfection and goodness, and that, consequently, as no one can be good and perfect without a participation in Him, and this participation can only be effected by being united to Him. Therefore, as it is prayer which unites our souls to God, you may conclude, without all controversy, that in proportion to your practice of it will also be your progress in the strict observance of the Divine law, in the readiness to perform acts of virtue, and in all that concerns the profit, the purity, and the perfection of the soul.

[1] St. Matt. vii. 7.

III. Next follows the settling how, and how far, you will in future practise these three methods of prayer. And first you must set yourself some portion of vocal prayers, to be regularly recited every day, taking notice that they are not to be merely gone through orally and without interior devotion, and that it is better to say a few *Paters and Aves* feelingly and from the heart than to gabble through the whole Rosary in a hurry. So that you should not overburden yourself in this matter, but fix on an amount such as you see that you can accomplish with relish, attention, and affection. For this reason, it is advisable to accustom yourself to pray vocally for the most part, rather in the way of colloquies with God placed upon your lips by a rightly disposed heart, than by means of formularies composed by others, and recited over and over in the same words, which you have either learnt by heart or read in some book. Then, as to meditation, resolve that you will not let a day pass without dwelling mentally for at least half an hour on some fundamental truth of our faith, as, for example, the many strict obligations we are under to serve God; the enormous wickedness of sin; the vanity of earthly things; the importance of everlasting salvation; and the Four Last Things. And if you wish for any instruction in this matter, you may make use of this, namely, that shortly before beginning your meditation, you should fix the matter in your mind, conceive a fervent desire of understanding it well, and in order to do so, recollect yourself, and banish all other thoughts from your mind, as though for that half-hour there existed only God and you. Next, when the appointed time has come, stand before your *prie-dieu*, and make an intellectual but vivid act of faith, that God is there present with all His Divinity; then consider the Infinite Majesty of that Sovereign, and having conceived a due reverence, place yourself

on your knees before Him, adore Him with all humility, and beg of Him the grace to spend that time profitably with Him. Lastly, after these two preludes, set yourself to meditate on the two, three, or four points which you have fixed upon, observing in each these five things. First, to endeavour vividly to realize the truth contained in it, using for that purpose reasons, comparisons, and other such arguments; and if it is purely speculative, deducing as a consequence another practical truth, which you must endeavour to understand and fix in your mind in the same way as the first. Secondly, make an application of both these truths to yourself, considering what sort of life you ought in consequence of them to lead, and the very different one which you have notwithstanding led. Thirdly, break forth into expressions of wonder, confusion, repentance, and other similar affections at the perversity of such a way of living. Fourthly, go on to make resolutions of doing better for the future, entering as much as possible into details on this matter, and observing beforehand both the difficulties which may be met in carrying them out, and the means which will assist in lessening them. Fifthly, as another means of strengthening these resolutions more powerfully, have recourse to the help of our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, of your angel guardian, and your holy patrons. Let us suppose, in order to understand this method of mental prayer better by a particular example, that the point on which we are to meditate is the uncertainty of the hour at which we may be surprised by death. You must, in the first place, be careful to convince yourself firmly of this speculative truth, both by the testimony which our Lord has left us in the Gospels, and from the reasons drawn from the frailty of our bodies, and the inevitable and various accidents to which men are exposed, and by the proofs given of it

every day by the early or sudden deaths of so many persons. Having done this, you will deduce another practical truth, that is to say, that since there is no hour when man is secure from death, he ought at every hour to be prepared for it. You must endeavour to make this truth as clear to yourself as the former one, by reflecting on the immense importance of this preparation, since to be struck by death without it is the same thing as to die and be lost for ever; and you may add, to confirm the reasonableness of so doing, the examples of fortresses which are continually on guard to prevent the possibility of an unforeseen assault, and of the watch which every wise man would certainly keep the whole night, if he knew that he would be attacked by thieves in the course of it, but were ignorant of the exact hour when this was to happen. Then, having thus duly recognized these two truths in the general, you should apply them to yourself, saying: "It is, then, most certain that there is not one of all the moments I have yet to live in which I may not die, and consequently it is equally certain that there is not one in whic I am concerned for my everlasting salvation, I ought not to be prepared for death. Have I hitherto done so? Alas, no; but without giving a thought to so great and imminent a danger, I have spent whole days and weeks out of the grace of God, that is to say, without the requisite preparations for death." After this acknowledgment of your past error, there will follow the affections proper to it, namely, anger with yourself, wonder that you could ever have been so improvident and foolish, horror at the remembrance of the dreadful risk you ran all that time, and gratitude for the goodness of God in so many times rescuing you from it. Then, that these affections may not be barren and purely speculative, you will follow them up by resolutions, saying to your-

self: "What shall I now do for the future? Shall I go on living in this disregard of that last moment on which depends my happiness or misery for all eternity? Surely not; and therefore I will not let a day dawn without considering in the morning that it may be my last, and urging myself to spend it as though it were so in reality; and if I should (which God forbid) ever fall through human frailty into mortal sin, I am firmly resolved not to allow death a moment of time to cut me off, and send me into eternity thus ill prepared, but without delay to place myself by the Sacrament of Penance, or by an act of perfect contrition, in the grace of God, that is to say, in that state in which I am required to be by no less a thing than my everlasting salvation." But because, on account of the great instability of your will, you have no reason to rely upon these resolutions, however strong you may think them, the last and most necessary conclusion of your devout exercise will be, as I have before said, to pray fervently to our Lord to strengthen and confirm them by the aid of His all-powerful grace. This, then, is the most ordinary and usual method of mental prayer; and when you have resolved on adopting it (or some other way which you like better) for the future, you have, in the last place, to arrange for the practice of ejaculatory prayers, to be repeated as often as possible during the day, so as not to lose the right thoughts of God and of the next life through the variety of worldly affairs. They may be either spiritual reflections on the things which you see, *hic et nunc*, or expressions of some devout affection, such as giving thanks to God, invoking His help, resignation to His will in all that happens, protestations that you will offend Him no more, desires of loving and serving Him perfectly, offering to Him the work you are engaged in, and other such acts sent forth like darts or rays of fire, from the bottom of your heart to heaven.

TENTH CONSIDERATION.

On conformity to the will of God in everything that happens.

SUMMARY.

I. The truths which should be laid down as the foundation of this virtue.

II. The reasons which urge us to it.

III. When and how we may do so.

I. You must lay down, and fix firmly in your mind that God has from all eternity most clearly foreseen and (with the single exception of formal sin) willed by express intention everything that happens in the world, although in its execution the actions and very often the evil will of men are also involved, in the same way as when blood is taken from you by leeches, the will of the doctor aims at nothing but your good, that is, to relieve you of superfluous humours, although the leech, which is the instrument of his intentions, has quite a different object, which is not to benefit you, but to satisfy its natural gluttony. And as you do not regard the creature's self-interested end in drinking your blood, but the doctor's benevolent one, so in all the successive events of the day you should recognize the will of God, which orders them all for your good, without considering the share which the hatred of men may now and then have in them, for they are nothing but the agents of His Divine will, and by their malice itself serve as instruments to His loving designs.

II. Place before you, and ponder attentively, the motives which make it right for you to conform and unite your will to that of God in all things. First, because all reason requires that a servant, such as you are in respect to God, should conform himself to what his master orders, and that a blind and distorted will like yours should let itself be guided by one which is always most wise and just, as is God's. Secondly, because it cannot be believed that God, Who is our Father, and loves us as such, would permit anything which He did not see to be useful for us; neither, on the other hand, is He capable of being mistaken in the choice of things, so as to take what is injurious for what is profitable; and therefore every one may be quite certain that there is nothing which happens contrary to his human interests from which he may not derive a greater good. "To them that love God, all things work together unto good."[1] Thirdly, because the more that any one is conformed to the will of God, the more ready and inclined does he find Him to grant his just desires. Fourthly, because by willingly accepting from the hand of God whatever happens, troubles are less felt, and the soul rests in a state of perpetual and happy peace. Fifthly, because the opportunities of practising conformity to the will of God presenting themselves very frequently indeed from morning to night, you will, by being exact in renewing its exercise at such times, not only gai the merit of so many and excellent acts of this virtue, but you will come to pass the whole day in continual union with God with the greatest ease, and almost without thinking of it.

III. Lastly, you have to determine the manner in which you will in future practise this heavenly virtue. The best ways of doing so are two in number, the one

[1] Romans viii. 28.

general and invariable, because it is independent of the variety of things which happen, and which consists in fixing upon a set number of times, such as ten or twelve a day, at each of which you will repeat this general act of conformity to the will of God as to all events, past, present, or future—"O Lord, I rejoice in everything that has happened from the beginning of my life, nay, from the beginning of the world, by Thy ordering. I rejoice also in all that is now happening and that will happen throughout this day, and for the whole of my life, and for all eternity. It has all been planned most perfectly. Nothing better could or can happen. I accept, approve, and embrace it all with the most perfect fulness of will. O Lord, may Thy most holy, just, perfect, adorable, and amiable will be done in me, with me, concerning me, and all belonging to me now, henceforth, and to all eternity. Amen." The other way of practising conformity to the will of God is particular, and constantly changes according to the matter with which it is concerned, namely, the distasteful occurrences, humanly speaking, which succeed one another in the course of the day. And it may be practised by the three following acts. First, whenever any such occurrence happens to you, to consider with what readiness and calmness you would receive it if you heard God say to you, "I have, for your greatest good, decreed and willed from all eternity that this trouble should come upon you to-day, and with the same paternal intention I now send it to you and desire you to endure it, although it would be very easy for Me to prevent it." Secondly, although you do not with your bodily ears hear this expressly said to you by God, yet to be just as entirely certain of it as if He allowed you to see Him and assured you of it audibly. Thirdly, after having impressed this truth on your mind by an

express and firm assent, to accept the occurrence which has happened to you, be it what it may, with the disposition of mind befitting a thing decreed and brought about by God for your greater good; that is to say, without any dislike or complaint, but on the contrary, with the fullest approval and entire satisfaction, repeating over and over again with a cheerful voice and smiling countenance, "It has happened as pleased the Lord: blessed be His Name. Not as I will, but as Thou wilt. So be it, so be it. It is just and right, nothing could be better. Even so, Father, for so it has seemed good in Thy sight."

ELEVENTH CONSIDERATION.

On mortification.

SUMMARY.

I. How many sorts of mortification there are.
II. The motives we have for practising it.
III. The particular acts to which the practise of it may be reduced.

I. You must observe that as mortification consists in perpetually resisting the natural appetites, and as some of these have for their objects the gratifications of the body, that is, of its senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, and others those of the mind, that is, of its faculties, the understanding and the will, so also is it divided into exterior mortification, which is opposed to the former, and interior, to the latter appetites. Further, as both bodily and mental gratifications spring, some from the presence and actual enjoyment of what gives pleasure, and others from the want and absence of what gives pain, so too, the mortification which is contrary to them may be again divided, partly into the kind which deprives the body and the mind of things naturally pleasant, and which is therefore called negative, and partly into that which obliges them both to endure the opposite, and which is on that account termed positive. And here there are three more things to be noticed: first, that this latter division, into negative and positive acts, regards exterior rather than interior mortification, while the acts of the latter, as may easily be seen by any one who thinks about it, are nearly all negative. Secondly, that the necessity and

importance of mortification being in proportion to the hurtfulness of the gratifications which it opposes, and the natural gratifications arising from the actual enjoyment of the objects which cause them being, speaking generally, much more injurious to the soul than those which depend upon the privation of the contrary objects, so, too, negative is far more important and necessary than positive mortification. Thirdly, that as the gratifications of the understanding and will are not necessary to the health and life of man in the same way as certain bodily gratifications are, those, namely, which belong to taste and touch, so it is possible to err on the side of excess in the practice of exterior mortification, which is not always praiseworthy in proportion to its extent, whereas the practice of interior mortification is free from such dangers, and the more entire and absolute the better it is.

II. Consider the many and powerful motives which urge on you the zealous practice of this virtue. In the first place, we cancel by this means the heavy debts which by our many sins we have contracted to the justice of God, and which we continue to increase daily; and surely it is much more reasonable to discharge them now by the far lighter, and moreover meritorious, satisfaction we can make in this world, than to wait to pay them, and that without gaining any merit, in the terrible fires of Purgatory. Secondly, because mortification, besides obtaining the remission of faults that we have committed, preserves us from committing them in future, both because by continually resisting the inclinations of our inferior appetite, it makes it, like a well-broken colt, bear the guidance of the rein, and not rush so impetuously wherever its natural impulse draws it, and also because by accustoming us to refuse even lawful pleasures, and to choose sufferings which are not imposed by any law, it gra-

dually makes it less painful and difficult to us, not only to abstain from pleasant and to endure unpleasant things, but also to fly from sins which are committed for no reason but the desire of some delightful object, or the dread of one which is disagreeable. And therefore, just as freedom from mortal sin is a common thing with those who practise mortification, so with those who entirely neglect it it would be a metaphysical case and an unexampled wonder. Thirdly, this is the surest, indeed the only infallible, proof of the true and solid love of God, which without it, although it should glow with seraphic affections, would only be a superficial love of very little value. Nay, there is no better way either of regaining this very affection and sensible fervour of Divine charity when it has been lost by a sudden aridity, or of keeping it alive during the day as it was enkindled in the prayer of the morning, than by acts of mortification repeated many times a day by its inspiration. For, as often as they are made, so often must the thought and the love of God, to please Whom they are performed, be revived in the soul. Fourthly, because, although mortification is not the essence of Christian perfection, yet it is so necessary an instrument of it that no one who neglects it can be a spiritual, interior, and perfect man; and the more that any one is so, the more does he advance in the practice of mortification, according to that universally received maxim of Thomas à Kempis: "Thy progress will be in proportion to the violence thou doest to thyself." And so we see that all the saints excelled at least in interior mortification; and that as to that which is exterior (the utmost rigour of this part of the virtue not being so necessary or suitable for every one), they all practised it in some measure. Fifthly, because mortification is the most efficacious of all means for quieting the tumult of our irregular passions, and consequently for

causing us constantly to enjoy that interior quietness and peace which all men so greatly desire and seek.

III. Having settled these motives for the exercise of mortification, you must settle the practice of it for yourself. And this, to be perfect, would require you to deny both your interior faculties and exterior senses every unnecessary gratification, and, on the other hand, would compel them both to endure, so far as is possible without serious injury, everything that they abhor. If you are not disposed to act with all this strictness, choose at least some measure of it, sufficient to make you an absolutely mortified man, and one who professes to check rather than to indulge his self-love. Such a measure you may believe it to be if you resolve to observe the following points. First, to forbid your eyes ever to gaze upon well-formed and beautiful persons, or their vain apparel, or any other pomp and splendour of the world, and in order the better to accustom them to such restraint, often to refuse to let them look upon other objects which are not necessary, although quite indifferent, and which are in no way dangerous to the soul, as a dog, a bird, a flower. Secondly, never to listen to soft and tender voices, especially women's, nor to any songs except moral and religious ones. Thirdly, to smell no scents but such as are natural, like those of herbs and flowers, but above all to avoid those which proceed from the persons and dress of those who perfume themselves purposely. Fourthly, never to eat except at meal times, at least not of dainties such as are relished even when one is not hungry; and not even of bread or any ordinary article of food without great necessity. Fifthly, to restrain the desire of eating as much as possible when at table, for which reason you should avoid dining out of your own house, and should you be obliged to to do so by any sufficient cause, neither then, nor at

dinner on great feasts, should you eat more than at the usual family meals and on the other days of the year, always taking care to leave something on your plate, and a greater quantity of any particular dish to which you are more strongly inclined by natural taste ; indeed, it would be better to abstain from these entirely, and never to touch some choice meats, such as poultry, preserves, and sweet things ; never to add to the dishes set before you any sauces for the mere sake of increasing their flavour ; adding to your wine water enough to destroy its natural pleasant taste, and lastly, never eating as much as you are inclined to do, but leaving off before your appetite is fully satisfied. Sixthly, besides this abstemious practice with regard to food, to observe some measure of fasting, either general once a week, or more strict, that is confining yourself to bread and water on certain days of the year. Seventhly, never to sleep *ad satietatem*, but to spring from bed as soon as you hear the prescribed hour for rising strike, thus beginning the day well with this act of mortification, instead of badly by an act of laziness, and yielding to your love of self. Eighthly, not to be too particular about bodily inconvenience caused by heat or cold, the sun or wind and rain, or by troublesome little insects, such as flies, fleas, or gnats, so as to be exceedingly annoyed by them, and to take every possible means of avoiding the least touch of them, like some persons who in winter lose a great part of the day sitting by the fire, and who in summer might have their heads made of butter, so greatly do they dread exposing them to the sun for a few paces, not to speak of the impropriety with which they take off or unfasten their clothes in the house, and who cannot for an instant bear a fly on their faces or a flea inside their collar, but, when at table with others, or even while praying, or hearing Mass, use their hands to get rid of

the annoyance with great want both of good manners and devotion. Do not you, I say, be so delicate and sensitive, but be willing to endure some degree of these common inconveniences, even thanking God for giving you these trifling opportunities of bearing something for His sake and for the cancelling of your sins. Ninthly, do not aim at the most comfortable position of body in sitting or kneeling, but that particular one which is most comfortable to modesty and propriety, and accustom yourself even to pray as far as possible without leaning on your elbows, and sometimes keeping your arms extended for a time in the form of a cross, choosing a bench which is the least comfortable, and sitting on the edge without resting your arms on the sides, or your shoulders on the back. Tenthly, let your body feel, if not every day (which would be the best) at least at certain times in the week, some punishment of discipline, hair shirt, and pointed chains worn as a girdle.

So much for the exterior mortification of the senses; now to come to what concerns the interior mortification of the understanding and the will. The first thing is to repress all idle curiosity to know what does not concern you, and the knowledge of which only serves to fill the mind with useless and very often injurious fancies, such, for instance, as curiosity in noticing the actions and behaviour of others, inquiring what meat you are going to have to-day for dinner, finding out what people say about you and your affairs, asking the name, country, and rank of any one you meet, or what promotions to office, what wars between kings, what alliances, what inheritances, what political revolutions are happening in the world, looking out of the window in the morning to see what weather it is, calculating how many days off such a feast is, or how many pages are left of the chapter you have begun reading, never

yielding to the idle desire of inquiring about these and similar pieces of information, which, as they continually feed the natural avidity of the understanding, so, too, do they open a very wide field for its mortification. Secondly, do not be over anxious about your purposes and plans, even when they are virtuous, so as to be absolutely determined and to make up your mind that they will certainly take effect; but reflect that the contrary is possible, and prepare yourself for this by a calm indifference, so that you may not afterwards be disturbed if they should be thwarted and hindered by some unforeseen accident. Thirdly, if you feel urged very eagerly and vehemently by your inclination to do something which is purely for your own convenience, take that as a sufficient reason for putting it off; and indeed, if you cannot quiet that extreme excitement in any other way, give it up entirely. Fourthly, never do a thing at a wrong time because a sudden desire impels you to it: as for instance, if you happened to take up an interesting book just before going to bed, and had not patience to put off reading it till the next day, but began running it through at the time appointed for sleep. Fifthly, you should in the same way repress all other little desires by which you feel impelled to do a thing which naturally pleases you with impetuous haste and unrestrained eagerness, such as to begin some study which you like without pausing a little to purify your intention, and to direct it to God by a brief act of oblation, a very necessary thing which mortification not only forbids your neglecting, but requires you to do in this case more deliberately and seriously than usual. To this head belongs the accustoming yourself to put off for a while the opening of letters which you receive, in order to overcome your natural eagerness to see what they contain as soon as possible. Sixthly, do not, on the contrary, put off to the end of

the day or week the doing of things to which you are less inclined naturally because they are matters of obligation and not voluntary; but rather give them precedence of time before all others and perform them as soon as possible. Seventhly, never yield to those feelings of languor which from time to time overcome the mind without any sufficient reason, from the mere desire of liberty and change; but without paying any attention to them, go on keeping your usual arrangement of hours, employing yourself in your room until there is some reasonable cause for leaving it, praying for the usual length of time and in the usual place, and in short observing with unswerving fidelity all the other good habits which you have once determined on with cool and mature deliberation. Eighthly, submit your will to him who is over you in the place of God, never venturing to undertake any work, not even a holy one, without his approval, nor neglecting any which he has commanded or advised, however great may be the repugnance you naturally feel for it; even showing the same docility and complaisance to the desires of those you are with, when not unlawful, and rather accommodating yourself to their tastes than wishing to bring them over to yours.

TWELFTH CONSIDERATION.

On the love of our enemies.

SUMMARY.

I. Who the enemies are whom we must love, and what this love is.

II. How right and profitable it is to love them.

III. What are the means to render this easier.

I. By enemies you must here understand all those towards whom you have feelings of aversion, anger, ill-will, or revenge, that is to say, (1) those persons who have no bad feeling to you, but who are repugnant to you from the unsightliness of their imperfections, whether physical or moral; (2) those who fail in their duty to you, and cause you some inconvenience, loss, or annoyance by their rudeness, thoughtlessness, indiscretion, or want of consideration; (3) those who dislike you, and, in consequence of this, have done or meditate doing you some injury; (4) those who go so far as to insult you to your face by injurious words, or even actions. With regard to all these persons perfect charity requires you, first, to allow no rancour in your mind, but rather to desire for them and often to pray to God to give them every kind of consolation, honour, and prosperity, both temporal and eternal; secondly, to be careful in talking of them not to complain or speak ill of them, but on the contrary to use expressions of respect and esteem; thirdly, when you meet with them to accost them with a kind, cheerful, and smiling

countenance, notwithstanding any movement of natural aversion which may arise in your mind, as though they had either never offended you, or as though you had quite forgotten it; fourthly, not to avoid their society (unless, it may be, in the case of persons of the last named class) but rather to seek it, and to behave to them with all possible gentleness and courtesy; fifthly, to endeavour to do them every kind of service, whenever you have the opportunity, just as you would to your dearest and best of friends; sixthly, to try to make friends of your enemies, being assiduous in mildly pointing out at proper times to the first two classes the imperfections and negligence which displease you in them, so that they may see their impropriety, and be more careful to avoid them in future, and showing such cordial goodwill and humble service to the last two, that seeing the unreasonableness of continuing in their present bad disposition towards you, they may gradually change it for feelings of reciprocal regard and affection; seventhly, to keep a list of the persons belonging to each of these four classes, so as to commend them at least once a day to God, and to beg for them of His Divine goodness the same grace that you beg for yourself.

II. In order to excite this love in your heart, consider the incomparable kindness which God showed you when you were His enemy, in so readily pardoning every one of your many and enormous offences against Him, and not only restoring you to your former place as His friend and child, but even loving you more than before you had offended Him. From this you should draw the conclusion that it would be most unbecoming if when He, in return for this love of His, bids you in like manner love those who have offended you—"This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you"[1]—you were to refuse to give Him so

[1] St. John xv. 12.

just a compensation and satisfaction, thus meriting that severe reproof, "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest Me, shouldst not thou, then, have had compassion also on thy fellow-servant, even as I had compassion on thee?" Remember also that great declaration which He makes in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew: "If you will forgive men their offences, your Heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences."[2] A most powerful motive this, surely, for every one who knows how many sins, venial, at least, if not mortal, he is continually committing every day, and the heavy punishments which he is thereby continually meriting from the justice of God. When, therefore, he is thus assured that God will so deal with him in the matter of forgiveness as he has dealt with his enemies, not only has he no cause of anger against them, but rather he ought to regard and love them as special benefactors, by reason of the opportunity they afford him of certainly obtaining the remission of his sins from God. Oh happy then is the sinner who meets with one who has offended him, and the happier, the graver the offence! For what is this but to find the most speedy means of appeasing God, and obtaining from Him a fuller pardon? If only he knew his own interests, there is nothing he should more desire, nothing he should more rejoice at. Lastly, consider the great abundance of merits which, besides the forgiveness of your sins, you may acquire by this means. For to love our enemies for the love of God is the height of charity, and consequently the height of virtue and of Christian perfection. And, therefore, all that is said in praise of charity, as being the virtue dear to God above all others, useful beyond all others to ourselves,

[2] St. Matt. vi. 14, 15.

and sufficient of itself alone to fulfil the whole law, all this may be said, and still more largely said, of the love of enemies, which superadds to charity the value of another most excellent virtue, namely, mortification; thus causing its acts to be not merely noble in the highest degree from the sublimity of their motive, but also heroic in the highest degree from the difficulty of the work. And, on the contrary, it may almost be said that the man who does not love his enemies, not only lacks the perfection of charity, but is utterly devoid of true and theological charity. For, if he loved the rest of his neighbours not from a human but a purely Divine motive, how could he fail to love his enemies also, when he is equally urged to do so by the same heavenly motive, and even with still more special force? If, therefore, he does not love these latter, whom he can love from no motive but a Divine one, he has great reason to fear that in loving others he is actuated, not by the pure desire of pleasing God, but by low and natural motives of interest or taste. "If you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? . . . Be you therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect,"[8] that is by loving, after His example, even the undeserving. Whence we may infer that as no one can be called a man of solid and real virtue without mortification, neither can he be so called unless he loves his enemies, which is a very necessary part of interior mortification, no matter how many devotions, alms, exterior penances, and other good works he may perform.

III. The next thing is to have ready to hand those means which may facilitate the exercise of this virtue, which is no less difficult than it is necessary and important. And first, it is a good general means, that

[8] St. Matt. v. 46, 48.

is to say one applicable to all classes of enemies, after having, in your morning prayer, commended to God all who have ever in past time given you occasion of displeasure, to look on, also, to the fresh occasions of the sort which may be given you by any one during the day; and to resolve to love such a person with all the perfection which is commanded on this matter. Secondly, with regard to enemies of the first class, two things will help you: the one is to consider that the imperfections which displease you in them, besides being counterbalanced by many amiable qualities, may not really be so intolerable, and would not be so thought by one who examined them more closely, or regarded them less critically. The other thing is to accustom yourself to look upon them, whether great or small, as so many diseases, wounds, and miseries, that is to say, as objects which should rather move you to compassion for their evil case than to anger against them; more especially because, however self-love may dim your sight, you must see that you too have your defects, and those neither few nor slight: and as you would not like to be despised and detested, instead of being pitied with fraternal charity, by those who see your faults, so, too, justice requires that you should not hold in aversion those in whom you perceive any defect. There would be an end of Christian charity amongst men, who are all subject, some to one, some to another imperfection, if the sight of any one who possessed some fault were sufficient to make him be regarded with dislike. Thirdly, in order to bear with the second class more easily and sweetly, you may either consider the damage and annoyance occasioned you by their carelessness, want of thought, and imprudence, simply as the effects of God's paternal Providence, Who has decreed and willed them for all eternity for your greater merit; or you may reflect

how much greater negligence you are guilty of in God's service, and with what incredible goodness He bears with it; and after this comparison, be confounded at your pride and susceptibility which make you excited to anger at every want of attention to yourself, as though men, who are your equals and companions, owed you more regard and service than you do to the Supreme Lord of the universe, Whose meanest slave you are, and one bound by the strictest obligations. Fourthly, it may be a useful means towards loving those who are more specially and personally your enemies, those, namely, belonging to the last two classes, if you place before you the incomparable example given you by the Son of God, Who became on the Cross the Advocate of His bitterest enemies, and the very great glory which it is in your power to gain by imitating this heroic act of His, seeing that thus it may be chiefly seen how solid is your virtue and how perfect your love of God. Endeavour, then, rightly to understand the efficacy of these means, and resolve to use each of them at the right time, so that by their help, but far more by that of Divine grace, you may perfectly love all kinds of your enemies, and those in particular to whom you are by natural instinct most averse.

THIRTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

On performing our ordinary actions in the most meritorious and perfect manner possible.

SUMMARY.

I. That the manner of performing actions is of the greatest importance to their value; and of three conditions which are requisite for making that manner thoroughly perfect.

II. In what actions one or other of these three conditions is most usually wanting, and ought therefore to be specially studied.

III. The practical resolution to perform all our actions in such a manner that they may lack none of these conditions, that is to say, no characteristic of goodness and perfection.

I. It is important to observe and fix firmly in our minds that the value of our actions depends much more on the manner in which they are performed than on what they are in their nature and of themselves: for it frequently happens that the same action has more or less value at different times according to the manner in which it is performed; indeed it constantly happens that there are two actions, unequal and different in their nature, that is to say, the one noble, and the other common, and that the former, on account of the imperfect manner in which it is performed, has little or no value in the sight of God, whilst the latter, being performed in an excellent manner, is raised to the very highest value. If, then, we are anxious, as every wise man should be, to make our actions fruitful for eternity, we ought not to be satisfied with doing many and great good works, but should also endeavour to do them in the best and most perfect manner possible, that is to

say, with a holy intention, with alacrity, and with diligence, which are the three principal conditions for doing actions perfectly. First, then, we must do everything we do with a holy intention, that is to say, not for evil or merely human ends, nor blindly and without reflection, being carried away by force of habit or impelled by natural instinct, but moved to will and choose each of our actions by the understanding and the love of some good end by which it may serve as a means; the chief of which ends should be the will and pleasure of God, so that, perceiving that we shall please Him by doing such and such things, we begin and carry through the action with the express and present intention of so pleasing Him. And here I observe, that as this intention of a right end is meritorious in proportion to its force and intensity, and as its intensity is greater when it is formally expressed in a well-considered and deliberate act, than when we are moved merely by the force of good habit, in a confused way, and without full advertence, so it will be well, in order to increase the value of our actions by it, if before beginning any, we expressly offer it to God, declaring that we are moved to desire it solely for His sake, and renewing this offering and declaration as frequently as possible while performing it. Secondly, we must also act with alacrity, and plenitude of will, for in order to perform our actions in the most perfect manner it is requisite to do so "not with sadness or of necessity,"[1] grudgingly, and as it were by compulsion, but cheerfully, willingly, and gladly, out of love for the will of God, which we are hereby fulfilling. And in order to increase the merit and perfection of our actions, this alacrity should be expressed to God in the beginning of them, and last at least virtually as long as they do. If therefore, we should perceive that in the course of the

[1] 2 Cor. ix. 7.

action it begins to flag, let us revive its first fervour by renewing its expression. Thirdly, it is necessary to add to these two conditions a great diligence in endeavouring to make every one of our actions thoroughly complete of its kind, and therefore taking care, before beginning it, to observe all that is necessary to its excellence, whether physical or moral, interior or exterior, essential or accidental, and then at once resolving to make every exertion in order that it may lack none of those things which we have seen to be requisite; for example, exerting ourselves diligently, that when we are about to celebrate Mass, there may be nothing left to be desired, either as to the fervour of interior devotion, or the modesty and gravity of exterior bearing, or the pronunciation of the words, and the attention to the rubrics, so that it may be said to be a Mass which is perfect in all its parts.

II. In order the better to see in what actions any one of these three conditions is most commonly wanting, and therefore most requires to be studied, it will be well to observe the different classes into which our actions may be divided. For first, there are some which are very brief, and almost instantaneous, such as taking holy water or greeting a friend; some which last a considerable time, such as going for a walk or nursing the sick. Secondly, there are those which are virtuous in their nature, such as making one's confession; and those which are indifferent, such as studying. Thirdly, some are merely, exterior, like manual work; others exterior, like mental prayer. Fourthly, in some we labour for God, as in preaching or administering the sacraments; in others we hold intercourse with Him, as in saying Mass or reciting Office. Fifthly, some are of obligation and necessary, as are actions enjoined by Superiors; others free, such as those which are chosen spontaneously. Sixthly, some are habitual

and daily, such as those belonging to our state and calling, and others extraordinary, which we perform from time to time, either of necessity or of our own choice. Seventhly, some are agreeable, such as eating and taking rest, and all those that are to the taste of the agent; others unpleasant and disagreeable in their nature, such as those in which we practise mortification and humility. Having, then, taken notice of this, we shall see that the first of the three conditions, that is, a pure intention, ought, as it is especially needed, to be particularly aimed at, both in such actions as are agreeable to some inclination of ours, in all those which are in their nature indifferent, and in those which are virtuous, and undertaken, not by our choice at that actual time, but either at the bidding of another, or because they are binding or proper to our calling. For if such actions are not expressly directed to God in the beginning, and from time to time in the course of their performance, there is great danger of our being influenced by the gratification they cause us, or by the consideration of the worldly glory we hope to gain by them, or by the blind impulse of common custom, or by human respect, or some such purely natural end, rather than by any supernatural motive. While, in those in which we converse with God, or which are in their nature virtuous and contrary to our inclination, and chosen by ourselves without obligation, as it scarcely ever occurs that there is wanting at least some confused intention of a supernatural and Divine motive, so neither is it necessary to express it formally, except *ad melius esse*, and merely in order to gain an increase of merit. You can see, too, that there is great danger of want of alacrity and plenitude of affection, and consequently a great need of exciting these at the beginning, and renewing them afterwards now and then, in actions which are contrary to our inclination, and not

spontaneously chosen, but which are purely obligatory, and which we cannot neglect without blame, or some temporal loss. Lastly, you can see that as interior and spiritual actions, such as saying Mass, or mental prayer, it is more difficult to attain to that recollection of thought and of spiritual fervour which is requisite for their interior and essential excellence, so, too, it is necessary, in order to perform them well, to make greater efforts and exercise greater diligence.

III. After all this, you have to conclude from the foregoing remarks and to determine with yourself in what manner you must act in future, so that none of your actions may be wanting in the perfection required; and especially you should determine on practising the following things: first, to perform no action, even the most common, usual, and minute, whether religious, such as making the sign of the Cross, or polite, such as bowing to another in token of respect, formally, blindly, and merely from habit, but, in all these good customs, to think of what you are doing, to resolve to do it with advertence, and to accompany the exterior propriety by some interior act. Secondly, to begin no work of any length of duration, especially such as are performed by regular and daily repeated custom, without first distinctly reflecting on it, and on the time you intend devoting to it, saying to yourself, for example: "I am going to study or to hear confessions till dinner time." Thirdly, having thus reflected, turn immediately to God, and if the work you are about to undertake has not Him for its immediate and only end, but may also be done for various other ends, direct it expressly to Him, and declare that you are led to do it merely to serve and please Him, a protestation which you will repeat several times in the course of the action. Fourthly, if the action is obligatory and not, humanly speaking, agreeable, declare to God that because it is

commanded by Him, you perform it with the greatest pleasure, and with a mental readiness to employ yourself in it gladly, should He so please, for the whole of the day, and even for all your life. Fifthly, at the moment of beginning the action, look on to the faults and venial sins which you will be liable to commit in it, such, for example, as sins of vain-glory, if it is performed in public; of impatience, if you should happen to be disturbed in it; of excessive attachment, if it is in conformity with your taste, which might prevent you from abandoning it willingly and at once if called elsewhere by obedience, that is to say, by the will of God; of irregular haste, if your business is necessary and not agreeable, so that you are likely to think, not so much of performing it well, as of getting through it quickly, out of eagerness to exchange it for an occupation more to your liking; look on, I say, to these and other similar faults, and then and there resolve to determine carefully to avoid them. Sixthly, to observe further, what is the proper, immediate, and particular end of the action you are about to perform, and what ways there are of doing it well, so as to let nothing be wanting which belongs either to its physical or moral perfection. And this attention chiefly regards actions which are in their nature virtuous, and in which we either converse with God, as in prayer, or seek the good of our neighbour, as in tending the sick, hearing confessions, and the like. Seventhly, after all this, to invoke the Divine aid, that we may perform the action in question in the manner which has been pointed out, that is to say, with a pure intention, with alacrity, and with the greatest perfection in every way, both negative, by avoiding the faults which might deform it, and positive, by observing the particulars which tend to embellish it and increase its perfection. Determine, then, with yourself never to begin an action

in future without prefacing it by this important preparation, checking by a wise moderation and mastery over yourself, the haste which sometimes urges you to pass from one action to another without even the briefest pause between the two, a haste which is surely more ill-advised and imprudent than words can say, for it treats as wasted, in regard of action, the time which is spent in the preparation necessary for acting profitably, that is to say, in a precaution, without which all our actions would be useless, and all the time occupied by them be lost and wasted.

FOURTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

On tranquillity and peace of mind.

SUMMARY.

I. That it is a treasure worthy of being sought after by all possible ways and means.

II. What are the ways and means which are either necessarily required, or best dispose the soul to its possession.

I. Consider that the innate desire which all men naturally have of so sweet a fruit as the peace of the soul might well be a sufficient inducement for seeking it with the utmost energy and care, for they value it beyond every blessing of this life, and it is, as it were, the end which they propose to themselves in all their various labours and undertakings. There are, however, many other reasons which concur to add a fresh impulse and a stronger stimulus to this natural instinct, that is to say, all the advantages which spring from it for your spiritual good. For the greater the peace, and the more tranquil the state of the soul, the better it is disposed to follow the dictates of reason, to discern a true from a false good, to conquer the temptations of the devil, to suffer trials cheerfully, to preserve friendly intercourse with its neighbours, and above all to make progress in the spiritual life, to contemplate heavenly mysteries, to hear the words and receive the inspirations of God. In a word, if we go through all the supernatural privileges which adorn the mind, we shall not find one which does not presuppose imperturbability and tranquillity of soul as

its cause, or produce it as its effect. So that we may say that if it is not in itself the essential perfection of the soul, it is at least a quality inseparable from it, the brightness, as it were, of its interior beauty and grace, and deserving, therefore, that virtues themselves should only be sought for so far as is permitted by this tranquillity, and that should they interfere with it, their natural value is lost, and they should no longer be accounted true virtues, but vices, because of this evil consequence.

II. Pass on now to the choice of the means necessary or useful for the gaining of so rich a treasure, and of these the principal seem to be the following thirteen. First, a vivid and habitual knowledge of our mortal state, which is by nature subject to all the accidents and disasters incident to life in the world, so that, having settled this beforehand, you may not think it strange that you are now and then in want of some comfort, that some plan of yours fails, or that some trouble comes upon you, but remembering that this is the law under which you came on entering the world, and by which all the rest of mankind are governed, you may bear, if not gladly, at least uncomplainingly and with equanimity, the share which has fallen to you in the distribution of lots, especially as you see how much heavier a one so many others groan under, and that you are possessed of no special right by virtue of which it should be laid upon them rather than on you. Secondly, a right, that is to say, a very mean, estimate of temporal and earthly things, as being of no value whatever compared to the good and evil of the future life, so that it should not make much difference to you whether you have them or not, whether events fall out in one way or another. For a man who is accustomed to regard things in this light cannot be really very closely affected by any occurrence of this

kind, as if it were a very great or important matter. Thirdly, to despise utterly and in a special manner whatever men may think or say in praise or blame of you, regarding it all as a thing entirely external to you, and therefore incapable of doing you either good or harm; for it would be impossible for any one who regarded it as a thing really and greatly affecting him for good or evil, not to live in continual care and anxiety on account of the uncertainty of an object so independent of any will of his. Fourthly, moderation of desires, that is, not to seek to undertake anything temporal with excessive vehemence, impetuosity, and ardour, but when you feel yourself thus moved at any time, either to check that extreme eagerness, or should that be at first difficult, and the thing in question not necessary, but only one of greater convenience, to give up doing or desiring it. Fifthly, do not take for granted that you will succeed in any plan or business with the ease and good fortune you desire, but always, on the contrary, suppose the worst, that is to say, try to foresee all the obstacles that may cross them from any quarter, at the same time imagining the moderation, interior, and exterior, with which you should behave, should you meet with any of these obstacles. Sixthly, do not undertake many different things without necessity, nor engage in more occupations than you can get through without hurry, weariness, or disturbance. Seventhly, apply yourself with cheerfulness and entire contentment to everything that is necessarily required of you by the duties of your state and calling, not hurrying to get through it from eagerness to pass as quickly as possible to some other occupation more to your taste, but thinking only of the excellence of that necessary action, loving and taking pleasure in it, as possessing sweetness sufficient to satisfy you for as long a time as you have to be employed in it. Eighthly,

when you happen to have several things to do in a fixed space of time, apply yourself to them with liberty of spirit, and with mastery over both yourself and the matter you are engaged in, so that, as these different things have to be done, not all at once, but first one and then another, in like manner you do not try to think about them all in the whole of the time, but of each in turn at the particular time when you are doing it, giving your whole mind and thoughts to it alone during that period, as though you had nothing else to do afterwards. Ninthly, live without any curiosity, not thinking about what others are doing, when the knowledge of it and the dwelling upon it is neither of any use to them nor any business of yours, and if you should be accidentally informed of it, do not concern yourself excessively on the subject, like some persons, who, when they see a confusion in this quarter through the imprudence of one man, another in another quarter through the malice of some one else, although it is no business of theirs to look after it, and the thing may not even be, humanly speaking, remediable, get angry and excited, and go about hunting after the subject and cause of their disturbance, as though they had nothing to attend to at home. If such people would mind themselves, and also reflect that disturbances will occur in human life as necessarily as storms frequently arise in the air, they would endure the former with proper moderation and patience, just as they do not trouble themselves about the latter. Tenthly, you should dismiss from your mind idle thoughts about the future and anything that may happen in it to distress you, for the ills which trouble us by their actual presence are not usually more than one or two at a time, and these are easily borne if they only last one day, so that, when present, they could not very greatly afflict us; but we increase their grievousness by

hourly dwelling, not only on the particular ill which we are actually enduring, or the suffering which it alone entails, but also on the fresh suffering which it will entail during all the successive days of its future duration, and, at the same time, on all the other ills which we shall have to endure one after the other in the future. Hence it comes to pass that our troubles afflict us at every instant, not only in proportion to their intensity, but also to their extension and duration, so that they make themselves felt when really they do not yet exist, and force us to swallow all their bitterness at one draught every day, which otherwise we should only have to do a drop at a time for our whole lives. In order, therefore, to keep yourself in a state of true patience and cheerfulness, you will find it wise and useful advice to put an end to these vain anxieties about the future, and to say to yourself whenever any of them begins troubling you: "What do I want or suffer at the present time that I should live in a state of sadness and anxiety? Certainly nothing; for this or that particular evil which troubles me is not heavy enough to be made much of by a sensible man, and to be cast down by it. But, then, if it is light in itself, the length of the time that it threatens to last makes it very heavy, and the more so that such and such other disasters seem very likely to fall upon me shortly. Away with such idle terrors! for it is quite certain that I cannot be hurt by an evil which does not exist, and also that at this present moment all these merely possible evils can be no more than if they were entirely impossible, and the future continuance of the present evil can be no more than if it were but momentary. If, then, having at present no existence, they can have no power to trouble me, why should I give them this power by grieving about them? Will not the trouble which will then come upon me be enough, without

anticipating the feeling of it to no purpose? 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.'[1] Now, thank God, there is nothing to prevent me from living contentedly and in peace. We shall have time enough to-morrow to think about what will happen then." Eleventhly, keep your soul free, not only from grievous sins, which every one can see are incompatible with its peace, but also from voluntary and deliberate venial sins, for it is not possible that they too should not disturb the mind with interior remorse. Hence Isaias calls peace the effect of innocence: "the work of justice shall be peace." Twelfthly, in everything be conformed to the Providence and will of God, which is a most efficacious means of preserving the soul in a state of perpetual and joyous peace, for it causes it to embrace lovingly, willingly, and with entire contentment whatever happens, either within or without itself by the will of God, and consequently every one of those accidents which, because they are contrary to its natural feeling and desires, are the only fortuitous occurrences which could disturb it. Thirteenthly, to go on in the spiritual life prudently, cheerfully, and with liberty of spirit, banishing from the soul those affections which disquiet it under a false appearance of good, and being especially careful to observe the three following counsels: first, that when any one falls into a fault through human frailty, he should not be disturbed and overcome by useless sadness, after the manner of some vain and proud spirits, who, in consequence of the confidence they have in their own virtue, think it an extraordinary thing that they should fall, and, because of their inordinate opinion of their own excellence, are beyond measure troubled at seeing themselves just as faulty, frail, and imperfect as others; but after having briefly retracted his fault, and this rather because it is an

[1] St. Matt. vi. 34.

offence against God than because of his own weakness and misery, to go on at once with the same energy, courage, and fervour as before—nay, even greater than before, in the path of God's service, being assured that grief for the faults that we have committed is wise and praiseworthy just so far as it is a spur to make us correct them by other and better acts; but that if, by being too much prolonged and too sensible, it diminishes the eagerness we felt before to serve God perfectly, it should be avoided as the offspring of love of self rather than of God, and an affection detrimental rather than profitable to our progress. The second counsel is not to spend much time (unless it is done purely to humble himself) in considering what and how much progress he has made in the spiritual life, either absolutely or as compared with others, nor, if he finds it to be but scanty, to be afflicted and disheartened from a human and natural sorrow at his own imperfection, but enduring his present poverty with tranquillity, like a really humble person, and rejoicing that he has nothing in himself in which he can take pleasure, to resolve that he will, wretched and imperfect as he is, love and serve God for the time to come, as well and perfectly as, by the help of His grace, he is able. The third thing is to avoid also all excessive and painful anxiety about his future progress in the path of perfection; for the soul should not be disquieted even by the desire of this, as is the case when desire of our own excellence and of the enjoyment of self-complacency in ourselves is the root from which they spring; but they should be (and this in no degree lessens their efficacy) gentle, cheerful, and calm, as they always are when they proceed from pure love of God. To which end it will be a help to aspire to perfection under the guidance of these two truths firmly implanted in the mind: first, that the good issue of this matter does not so much

depend upon our care or exertions as upon God's free goodness, on which alone, and on a humble recourse to which, all our confidence should rest; secondly, that it is not the will of God to raise all His servants to the same, but some to a greater others to a less, degree of sanctity; and we should, therefore, be in the disposition to be perfectly contented with that measure, whatever it may be, which He is pleased to grant us, though it may be less than that which we should desire, and which we see bestowed on others. For when we consider the demerit of our sins, we may well regard it as an extraordinary favour that He should condescend to raise us to even the lowest degree of perfection, nay, even so much as to preserve us in His grace, and free from those mortal sins into the terrible abyss of which we see so many fall every day, and into which we too should fall, were we not supported with singular mercy by Him.

FIFTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

On devotion to our Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

SUMMARY.

I. How right and important it is to apply ourselves diligently to this devotion.

II. What are the means which will help us to acquire it.

III. What are the acts by which we may practise it.

I. Consider how right and important it is to have a very special devotion to our Lord abiding with us in the world under the sacramental species. Nothing, certainly, can be more clearly right. For whether you regard the infinite excellence of the Person, Who He is—that is to say, the very and true Son of God, the absolute Lord of the whole universe, "the King of kings and Lord of lords;" or the equally infinite obligations you are under to Him, for having been so mercifully redeemed by Him at the cost of His life; or His incredible love in having chosen, even after He had risen again and ascended into heaven, to remain upon earth, "even to the consummation of the world," for no other end but to be close at hand to help us with His heavenly succour; nay, more than this (a thing which no one could ever have thought of asking), to feed us in a most marvellous and unheard-of way with His very Body; I say, whichever of these points you consider, every one of them, and still more all of them together, prove how detestable would be your ingratitude and insensibility if you did not, in return, render all possible marks of love and service to a Lord

of such incomparable greatness, charity, and condescension towards you. But it is no less evident what precious and inestimable fruits you may expect from thus acting. For in this great Sacrament we have actually present with us His whole Divinity and Humanity, exactly as He is in heaven, or as he was "in the days of His Flesh" in the countries of Judæa, Jesus Christ, that is, the Divine Word, Who was made Man for us, and given us by the Eternal Father to be our Saviour, Advocate, Master, Guide, and Physician; our Defence, our Strength and Refuge, our Light, our Life, in a word, all that we can desire for our good; Who, as we know by most certain proofs, loves us more than we are loved by earthly father or friend; Who desires nothing more than to help us in our needs, and Who, therefore, even as in His mortal life He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil,"[1] so does He still continue to dwell amongst us, impassible and glorious, in order to bestow upon us, when we seek Him on His altars, an equal abundance of graces. And this being so, who does not see that it is as important for you to merit His special protection by rendering Him due love and service, as it is to have Him for a most ready help in all your needs, a most efficacious and universal remedy for all your infirmities, a most sure defence in all your dangers? My God! what good thing have you that you can love if you do not love Him? In whom can you trust, if not in Him? To whom can you turn for help, if not to Him?

II. Consider, that as this devotion chiefly consists in three affections, namely, reverence, love, and confidence, shown to our Lord present beneath the veils of the sacramental species, the only means of gaining it is to impress deeply on our minds those truths from

[1] Acts x. 38.

the firm and vivid faith in which these affections naturally spring, which are these two. The first, that Jesus Christ, both on account of His incomparable dignity, and of the immense love for us which He displayed in His Passion, and of His absolute will and power to do us good, deserves that we should serve Him with the most humble, loving, and trustful devotion possible. The other truth is that this Person of infinite merit is wholly and really present in every consecrated Host. Therefore, if we firmly believe these two points, we shall certainly entertain the same affections towards every consecrated Host that we should if He were to show Himself visibly to us in His proper likeness; and we shall be no less diligent in visiting Him, paying Him homage, and remaining with Him, though hidden beneath those accidents, than if we dwelt with Him present amongst us without a veil, as the Apostles did. All your study should therefore be to quicken this faith, that is to make it as clear, express, and distinct as possible. And so, when you are in the presence of the Adorable Sacrament, do not be satisfied with saying coldly, "I believe that Jesus Christ is here really present;" but say with a more special and distinct act, "I believe most certainly that beneath these accidents there is present, no less really than He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, the Son of God Who for our salvation became Incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the same Who, nine months after, was born in Bethlehem true God and true Man, the same Who, under the Name of Jesus Christ, lived in Palestine for three and thirty years, preaching and working miracles, and Who at last died upon the Cross to deliver all mankind from everlasting death. Yes, He Himself, my Saviour, my Lord, my God, and all my good, although after His glorious Resurrection He ascended into heaven there to reign for ever, does

nevertheless, in virtue of His Omnipotence, abide here also invisibly before me. He is here to listen to my prayers, to bestow on me His graces, to feed me with His Flesh; and I, because of the revelation He has made to the Church, believe in this Presence as much, nay, far more firmly, than if I here beheld Him face to face, with these my bodily eyes."

III. Lastly, settle how often, and in what manner, you intend to practise this devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, both by receiving Him in Holy Communion, by being present when there is renewed in the Mass that great Sacrifice once offered of Himself and by Himself upon the Cross, and by visiting Him in His churches with a homage of dutiful service. With regard to the matter of frequency, not a week should pass in which you do not once at least approach the Eucharistic Feast; not a morning in which you do not hear one or two Masses, nor a day in which you do not visit Him a certain number of times, which may be increased on days when you are more at leisure, but never diminished without a very serious impediment. It would be an excellent practice if in going through the town you were never to pass a church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved without going in to salute It, or at least (as in great cities where you find such churches at every few steps) without taking off your hat and humbly adoring It in the streets. As to your course of conduct with regard to all these exercises, particularly Mass and Communion, that is to say, with regard to the holy thoughts and affections with which you should occupy yourself in hearing the former, and both before and after the latter as preparation and thanksgiving, it would take too long to speak of this even compendiously. I will leave it therefore to yourself, after seeing what Giannotti or Rodriguez has written on the subject, to make a rule according

to your taste. With regard, however, to the third exercise, namely, that of daily visiting the Blessed Sacrament, I think it wise to propose to you, as a very right and profitable method of doing so, the following: Kneeling down before the holy Tabernacle, make an express act of faith both concerning the infinite dignity and the real Presence there of our Lord, an act which should be followed by these three; first, to adore Him with the deepest reverence as your God and sovereign Lord, and that of the whole universe; secondly, to return Him most humble and loving thanks for His exceeding love to you in having been pleased both to redeem you with the price of all His Blood, and to continue in the world, even to its end, by His sacramental Presence, as your spiritual food and consolation; thirdly, to supplicate Him for the help you need in order to avoid all sin, to advance more and more in His holy service, and to attain the harbour of everlasting salvation, so that all the great things He has done and suffered for this end may not be in vain:

Quærens me sedisti lassus,
Redemisti Crucem passus,
Tantus labor non sit cassus.

And, as He Himself said to the Apostles, and in them to us all, "without Me you can do nothing,"[2] you must surely see how needful it is both that we, if we believe these words, should implore His aid to serve Him well; and that He, if He would be served by us, should not refuse to give it to us at the times He chooses, that is to say, always.

[2] St. John xv. 5.

SIXTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

On devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

SUMMARY.

I. The motive we have for entertaining it.
II. The ways in which we may practise it.

I. Set before yourself the very strong reasons there are on all sides which urge you to reverence, love, and serve this heavenly Queen in every possible way. In the first place there is, on her side, her excellence and dignity, which are superior to those of all other mere creatures, and which are, in a certain sense, infinite: because she was chosen by God to be His true Mother, that is to say, to be united to her by a tie more close, more affectionate, and demanding greater respect than any other by which He can be united to a created person, and was besides enriched with all those special and extraordinary privileges which were necessary in order that she might bear that title worthily; that is to say, with immunity from all, even the least stain of sin, with all virtues in the most heroic degree, and with sanctifying grace incomparably greater than was ever bestowed on man or angel. And thus her glory in the highest Heaven is exalted above any dignity of theirs, far beyond the proportion in which that Empyrean transcends all the lower heavens, and just as Jesus Christ, her Son, is by nature Sovereign King, Lord, and Ruler of the whole created universe of heaven and earth, of angels and men, so too has she, as being His Mother, a share in these titles, and she ought to be

acknowledged and worshipped by all creatures in earth and heaven as their sovereign queen, lady, and ruler. Next, on the part of God, we are incited to this devotion, because Mary is of all created persons the one most nearly allied to Him, and most beloved by Him, and on both these accounts it is clearly proved how great should be our esteem and love for her. First, our esteem should be very great, because every creature is estimable in proportion to its participation of God, and the greater this participation the closer the alliance with God, for it is the property of God not to love any object unless He either sees in it, or by His love produces in it some value; whence it follows that the greater the value possessed by any object, and the greater the esteem it deserves, the more it is loved by God. And no less evident from this reason is the greatness of the love we owe her. For as it is the nature of this affection that it is not borne towards any person without embracing also whatever is loved by that person, or whatever belongs to him by any particular tie, and that the nearer and dearer anything is to the beloved one the greater is the love borne to it, how can we truly love God without thence conceiving a proportionate love to her, whom we know to be more pleasing and more closely united to Him than any other simple creature? All the more, when we know that this is His will; for if we are required by that to love and serve all His servants, how much more His most holy Mother? And if, as St. John bears witness, He commands "that he who loveth God love also his brother,"[1] must it not also be His will that He who loves God should also love His Mother? Lastly, on your side, there is the motive of the great benefits which you have received and may hope for from her. For, when you reflect on the former, what would be

[1] 1 St. John iv. 21.

your ingratitude if you did not love and serve with the tenderest devotion her from whom you have received Christ, your Redeemer, your only Life and Salvation? And still more ought this to be so, because, not satisfied with having given Him birth that He might redeem you, she has, besides co-operating for your redemption that physical and material concurrence, still further co-operated by another concurrence which lays you under a still greater obligation, because it is moral and voluntary, inasmuch as she offered up to death for the ransom of men, with the fullest consent of will and affection, that glorious Son Whom she loved more than herself, so that, wonder-struck by this incomparable kindness and charity of hers to us, we may apply to her those words of the Apostle concerning the Eternal Father: "He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?"[2] Then, as to those benefits which you may expect from her immense liberality, if you serve her devoutly, it is enough for you to know that she is the Mother of Mercy, who has been made by God the advocate of the needy, mediator between Him and us, and the dispenser of all His graces, with full liberty to ask of Him whatever she pleases, and to whom He has positively promised she shall obtain whatever she asks for the good of her servants. Meditate, then, upon all these reasons which incite you to be devout to so great a lady and protectress, and conclude from them how blind you would be to her merits, how ungrateful for her favours, how rebellious to the Divine will, and how negligent of your most weighty interests, if you did not resolve to serve her henceforward with every kind of the most loving and reverent worship.

II. After having in the general resolved on this worship, pass on to settle the particular ways in which

[2] Romans viii. 32.

you will practise it; and these may be the twelve following. First, to fix upon a day on which, after Holy Communion and some further devout preparation, you kneel before some statue or picture of her, and in a set and solemn form of words choose her for your patroness, and dedicate yourself to her as her perpetual servant, and this offering and consecration of yourself you should renew every Saturday, or at least on all her feasts. Secondly, to be enrolled in some one of her congregations, and to assist devoutly at its exercises. Thirdly, to recite daily her office or rosary, or some other prayers in her honour. Fourthly, to visit daily some church dedicated to her. Fifthly, always to perform some act of reverence, both exterior and interior, on hearing her name, amd in passing before her statue or picture. Sixthly, to practise some special exercise of penance and piety on Saturdays. Seventhly, to fast on the vigils of her feasts, and to receive Communion and to give some alms in her honour on these latter, thus rejoicing with her, and returning God thanks for those prerogatives of hers, which the Church celebrates on those days. Eighthly, to delight in speaking of her glories in order to promote in all men reverence and devotion to them. Ninthly, to have some representation of her in your room, and devoutly to ask her blessing before it as soon as you rise in the morning, before retiring to rest at night, and whenever you go out or come in. Tenthly, to offer her some little flower every day, that is (according to the manner of speaking introduced by those who are devout to her) some act of interior or exterior mortification performed in her honour. Eleventhly, to imitate her in your daily actions, trying to do them in the manner in which it is probable that she did. Twelfthly, to have recourse to her with child-like confidence in all your trials and necessities.

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TITLE Christian Refomed, The